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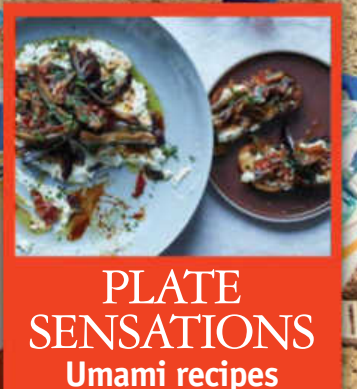
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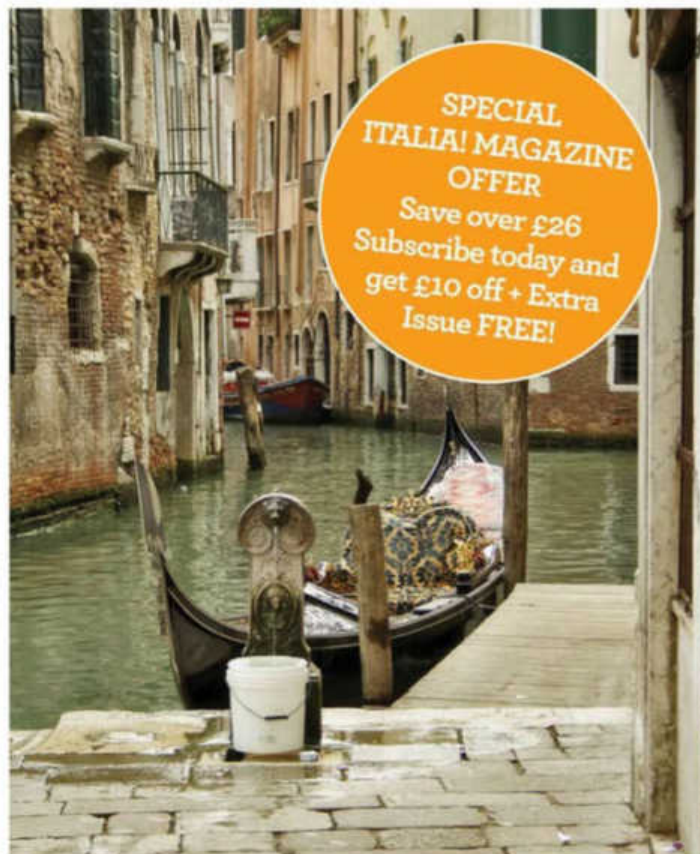
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Welcome!



Enjoy your food and your wine? Then we've got plenty in store for you in this issue of *Italia!*. For, as well as presenting a total of 15 sensational recipes (including six that introduce the concept of *umami* – tastes that defy convention), and reviewing seven bottles of Gavi wines from Piedmont, we also bring you a guide to the

wines of the country and (drum roll, please!) we publish the first ever *Italia!* Taste Awards. We've chosen the very best of the best from a range of categories covering everything from balsamic vinegar to wines red and white, and even pizza. Want to know which were our top picks? Turn to page 44.

If you have ever been to the coastal town of Cefalù in Sicily then you'll know just how relaxing a place it is. And it's the ideal place from which to explore the simply stunning Aeolian Islands by boat. In this issue we take you there, courtesy of James Miller, who suggests it's one of the most chilled places on the whole of the island. The perfect place to book a break as we approach spring? We reckon so. Read of his exploits from page 36.

Elsewhere in this issue we visit Florence, with its recently re-opened Duomo Museum and Baptistery (page 53), we experience the excitement (and mayhem!) of the Venice Regatta (page 62) and – as ever – we present you with property advice and much more. Enjoy!

Paul P.

Paul Pettengale Editor

PS Italia's brand new guide to Rome & the South is on sale now (£7.99). Visit www.italytravelandlife.com/italiaguides for details.

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Subscribe to *Italia!* today and save 28 per cent on the normal price – and get the magazine delivered directly to your door as soon as it is published every month. Turn to page 32 for details.

UK orders only



Enjoy the wines of Italy, see page 73

AWARD WINNER!
The Italian Tourist Board voted *Italia!* the 'Best Overall Publication 2011'



THIS MONTH'S CONTRIBUTORS



SARA SCARPA is a life-long resident of Venice and one of the best-placed journalists to write about the city. In this issue she recounts her experiences of last year's famous

Venice Regatta, probably the most colourful series of boat races in the world. Want to attend this year's Regatta in September? Now's the time to book!



FLEUR KINSON is our go-to property expert when it comes to buying in Italy. In this issue she asks the question: do you really have to buy outright? She explores the

alternative option of fractional ownership, which offers high-ticket luxury at a comparatively low price. If you'd like your special place in Italy, turn to page 22.



CHRIS ALLSOP returns to Florence for us in this issue to explore the newly-opened and expanded Museo dell'Opera del Duomo, the revitalised Baptistery and the other sites in what

can justifiably be called the 'new' Florence. Go off season, he says, if you want to experience the renovations without big crowds and long queues.



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ON THE COVER



YOUR ITALIA!

READERS' PHOTO COMPETITION!

Send us your favourite photos from your Italian travels, and each month the best photo will win a bottle of **Nino Franco Rustico Prosecco** and cooler!*



▲ **THIS MONTH'S WINNER**

Stephen Spencer, Rhode Island, USA

"Early morning traffic on the Grand Canal in Venice. Rialto Bridge area."

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WIN!
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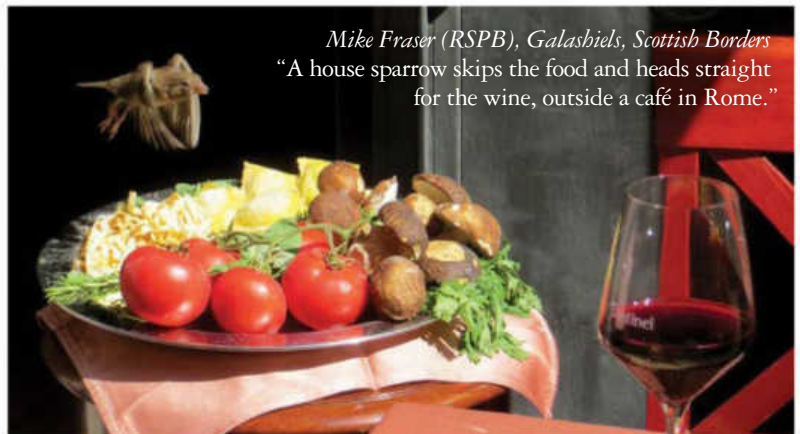


◀ *Peter Colligan, Waterloooville, Hampshire*
“This was taken on our first visit to Lake Garda. We stayed in the beautiful lakeside town of Limone and this was the wonderful view that greeted us on arrival.”



◀ *Linda Tottem, Harrow, Middlesex*

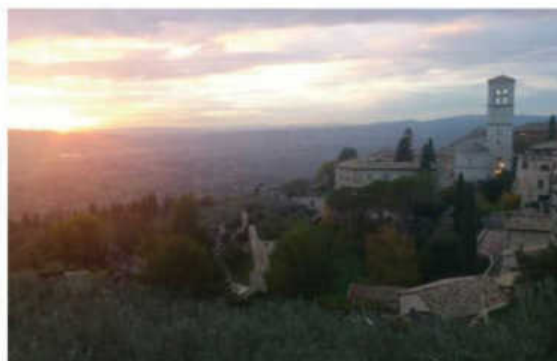
“I was wandering around Venice waiting for my partner to finish the Venice marathon when I saw this brightly coloured football shirt stall that I thought would make a nice photo. Just as I snapped, these three young boys walked into the shot and brought the photo to life.”



Mike Fraser (RSPB), Galashiels, Scottish Borders
“A house sparrow skips the food and heads straight for the wine, outside a café in Rome.”

▼ *Mike Fraser (RSPB), Galashiels, Scottish Borders*

“What was meant to be an easy detour off the motorway to the small town of Santa Maddalena in South Tyrol turned out to be so much more. Sometimes it takes a bit of bush-bashing, back-road driving and a few U-turns to find the best spots.”



◀ *Lorraine Cotterill, via email*

“Here is a sunset image I have taken in Italy. I have hundreds of images, as photographing *Italia* is my favourite pastime. My other half is Italian.”

HOW TO ENTER Email high-resolution (300dpi) jpegs of your photos of Italy to italia@anthem-publishing.com or send prints to ‘Reader Photo Competition’ at the address given on page 18. Please include a brief explanation of your photo, plus your name, delivery address and a phone number (for our couriers). You must be over 18 to enter.

READER OFFER *Italia!* readers get a 10 per cent discount off Nino Franco wines from www.sommelierschoice.com until 29 February 2016 by entering the code ‘italia10’ at the checkout.

Please note: Any photos you submit must be your own work and you must have the right to send them for inclusion on this page. By sending your entry, you are confirming that *Italia!*’s use of your photo(s) will not constitute infringement of any rights, and confirming that you are over 18.

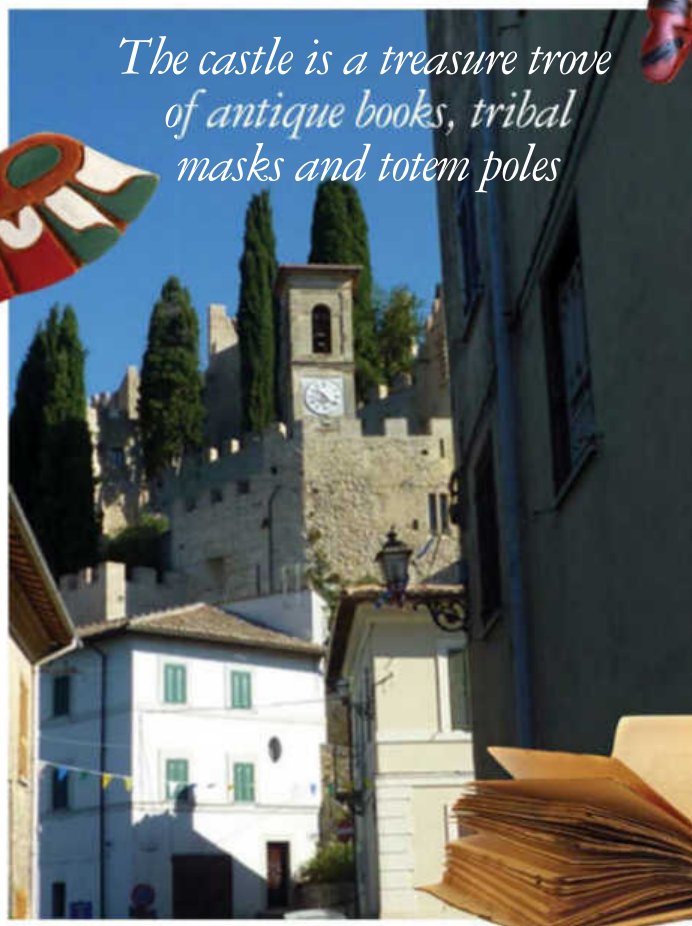


*Prosecco and cooler delivered to mainland UK addresses only

THIS MONTH

March 2016

In **Italian news** this month, why the Queen won't be getting her birthday wish, the increasing popularity of Italian wines and Italian hotels, the Pope's Fiat, and a fond goodbye to Ettore Scola...



The castle is a treasure trove of antique books, tribal masks and totem poles



Rocca Sinibalda

GRAND DESIGNS

An Italian castle once owned by an American hedonist who first patented the bra has been given a major restoration. During the 1950s, the Castle of Rocca Sinibalda – 50 miles north of Rome – was the residence of inventor Caresse Crosby, who used it to host parties for the likes of Salvador Dalí and Peggy Guggenheim. In the ensuing years the building fell into a state of disrepair, with any attempts to rejuvenate it hindered by the fact that it's surrounded on three sides by sheer cliffs and can only be entered via a steep, cobbled passageway. However, business consultant Prof Enrico Pozzi and his wife Cristina Cenci took up the restoration challenge, commissioning London-based architect Claudio Silvestrin to undertake the work.

Eight years and millions of pounds later, the castle is back to its former glory, and is a treasure trove of antique books, tribal masks and totem poles. Enthused Cenci, "The castle is a place of the past but we also want it to be a place for the future."

Left: "3 Rocca Sinibalda" by Ragusaibla - Own work. Licensed under CC BY-SA 4.0 via Wikimedia Commons - https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:3_Rocca_Sinibalda.PNG#/media/File:3_Rocca_Sinibalda.PNG

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SNIPPETS...SNIPPETS...SNIPPETS...SNIPPETS...SNIPPETS...SNIPPETS...

Photograph © Andrea Pattaro/Vision Venezia/ IPA MilestoneMedia/PA Images



POPE JUDE!

Jude Law swapped the paparazzi for a papal gown recently, as he filmed scenes for a new eight-part TV series in Venice. The English heartthrob was in St Mark's Square shooting *The Young Pope*, in which he plays a fictional pontiff called Pope Pius XIII. But, while he certainly looked the part in his elegant white drapes, he ruined the effect somewhat by donning a padded jacket over the top of the costume between takes. We'll forgive him, though, as he was soon back to his sartorial best for a water-taxi tour of the city with the rest of the crew – donning an ultra-stylish black jumper and single-breasted grey jacket combo.

JUST ANOTHER DAY AT THE (BOX) OFFICE

Make of this what you will, but a film centred around an Italian man's obsession with holding down an easy nine-to-five job has become Italy's most successful film ever. *Quo Vado?* tells the story of a middle-aged worker (played by the multi-talented Luca Medici) who goes to great lengths to keep his cushy job in public administration. And the subject matter has obviously struck a chord – since the start of the year, the film has been viewed by eight million Italians, taking around €59 million at the box office. Said Medici, "I make fun of something that is obvious – we Italians are a people who are reluctant to change."

"If you want to see the Palio and really understand it, you have to come to Siena"

BID TO BRING SIENA HORSE RACE TO ENGLAND REJECTED

An ambitious plan to import a pared-down version of the Palio di Siena to England to perform at the Queen's 90th birthday celebrations has been thwarted. Organisers of Her Majesty's party, which is set to take place at Windsor Castle in June, had hoped to recreate the famous Italian horse race as part of a programme of equestrian events, and invited some of the Palio's runners and riders to appear. However, while they were flattered by the regal offer, officials of the twice-yearly race in Tuscany chose to decline the offer. "The Palio and its historic traditions had the honour of attracting interest from the royal court of the United Kingdom," confirmed Bruno Valentini, Siena's Mayor. "However, for organizational and ethical reasons, there were not the right conditions to even address the issue. If you want to see the Palio and really understand it, you have to come to Siena."



SEEK AND YE SHALL VINE

Interest in Italian wine has grown in the past three years, according to figures from Wine-Searcher's database. Since 2013, searches for Italian wine on the popular comparison site have increased by 37 per cent, with customers in the US showing a particularly high level of interest. The Tuscany and Piedmont regions account for around half of those searches; however, Tom Harrow of UK merchant Honest Grapes has a word of advice for oenophiles looking for good value: "There is room to discover other grapes from the centre and south, like Umbria's Sagrantino, Puglia's Negroamaro and especially Aglianico – the Brunello of the south, where the wines of Mastroberardino, for example, remain very underpriced for their quality level." In terms of wines themselves, Barolo was the most sought-after in the last quarter of 2015, scoring 12.17 per cent of Italian wine searches, with Toscana IGT coming in second place with 12.14 per cent.

Photography © iStock, unless otherwise stated

Photograph © Chris Radburn/PA Wire/Press Association Images

S...SNIPPETS...SNIPPETS...SNIPPETS...SNIPPETS...SNIPPE...IPPE

ITALIAN DIGS TAKE TOP HONOURS

It's official – Italy has some of the best hotels and B&Bs on the planet. Leading travel operator Booking.com has revealed that no fewer than four of the top ten establishments on its website are Italian – the Re Umberto in Milazzo, Sicily; the Ai Terrazzini in Matera; the Aedes in Lecce; and the Relais Paradise in Pisa. And Italian accommodation did rather well in Trip Advisor's recent Travellers' Choice Hotel Awards, too, with 125 facilities scooping gongs, and a further 150 receiving commendations. Tripadvisor's highest-rated Italian residence is currently the Casa Portagioia in Castiglion Fiorentino, Arezzo.

IT'S THE FORT THAT COUNTS

Thinking of taking your loved one somewhere nice for the weekend? Well, you might want to consult your bank manager before booking up the Castle Porrona Relais in the Tuscan hills – it costs a whopping £12,000 a night! For that money, though, you get exclusive use of the restored five-bedroom castle – originally built by the government of Siena in the 9th century – along with its spacious grounds. Said Ana Toledo, sales and marketing manager for the property, "The castle is very real and gives people the experience of living like a king and queen, with their own butler and chef."



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For those who love Italy as much as we do!



ITALIA!'S *Top picks*

Make that dream come true and **go and see Naples this year**, cycle safely, sleep easy, eat well, cook well, eat indulgently (in the middle of the night), learn Italian... Do it all!

TRY THIS!



SEE NAPLES AND DIE

It's hard to put into words how spectacular the sunsets over the Bay of Naples are. So why not find out for yourself with a short break at Sorrento's Bellevue Syrene hotel? Perched high above the seafront, this 5-star residence offers stunning panoramic vistas – hence why it's long been a favourite destination among artists and poets. Throw in a luxury spa, three restaurants and rooms that blend the chic with the unique, and the result is a sumptuous escape you won't forget. Prices vary, www.bellevue.it



▲ ITALIAN FLAG CYCLE SAFETY

Whether you're a Sunday cyclist or a true king of the mountains, wearing cool clobber can really make you look the part. KASK's Mojito helmet has an excellent pedigree, having been sported by Team Sky's riders in some of the world's top events – and with its lightweight (it's just 220g), unique hinged adjustment system and expanded polystyrene shell for optimising crash impact coverage, it's not hard to see why it's so popular. If you're still not convinced, this special edition is emblazoned with the colours of the *tricolore* flag, to celebrate KASK's Italian heritage. £96, www.sigmasport.co.uk

BUY THIS!



WEIGHT WATCHERS' SALAD DRESSING

When you make a new-year resolution to lose weight or be more healthy, those first few months can be a real challenge – after all, who likes giving up their favourite things? Happily, with Walden Farms' Italian dressings, you don't have to. These deliciously authentic salad toppers contains no calories, sugar, fat, carbohydrates, gluten or cholesterol, meaning you can enjoy the rich flavours of Italy without a conscience. Choose from Italian, Zesty Italian, Creamy Italian and Italian with Sun Dried Tomato. £3.38 for 355ml, www.powerbody.co.uk

TOP 3...THIS MONTH'S TOP 3...THIS MONTH'S TOP 3...THIS MON

Top 3 ideas for JULIUS CAESAR

Et tu, Brute? On 15 March 44BC, Brutus assassinated Julius Caesar... And now you too can '**Beware the Ides of March**' with these fabulous gift items!

1 DO THE DRYING UP
Most commemorative tea towels do tend to be slightly tacky or tasteless, so this one from WormArt, with its extremely cultured references, is a revelation. Made from 100 per cent cotton, its minimalist design depicts the Roman leader's iconic laurel wreath but, in a clever twist, it's been fashioned out of lines from Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*. So you can practise your best Laurence Olivier impersonation as you dry the plates from the afternoon's Sunday roast. £12.99, www.amazon.co.uk





FLUFFY CLOUD LIGHTS FROM ITALY

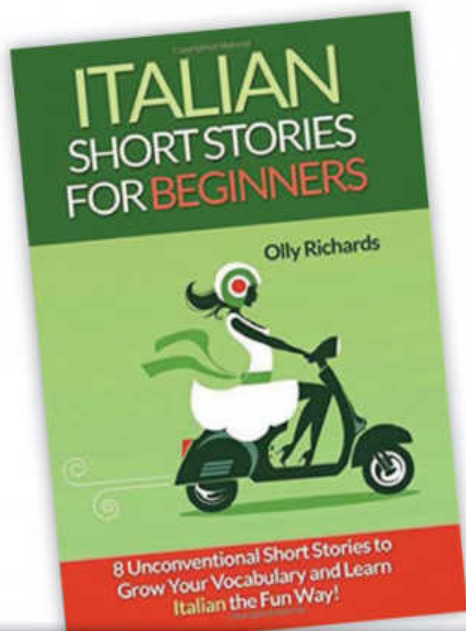
Sweet dreams are guaranteed with one of these fluffy, cloud-shaped lights hanging up in your bedroom. Made by Studio Italia Design, the Nuvola is regularly used as a prop at health spas, where it helps stressed people to drift away into a state of blissful relaxation. The two larger sizes contain a motor, which enables the light to move softly, imitating a real cloud on a summer's day. £360, www.italian-lighting-centre.co.uk

CHOCOLATE SPREAD

If you're the kind of person who likes sneaking downstairs for the occasional midnight feast, you're going to love the indulgent Gianduioso Hazelnut Chocolate Spread from Carluccio's. Made with the finest hazelnuts from northern Piedmont, in the Alpine region up on the Italian-Swiss border, it's perfect for eating straight from the tube, politely ensuring that you don't disturb the sleep of anyone else in the house. Of course, you could also put it on the breakfast table – and it is lovely spread on hot toast – although that might mean you have to share it with other people! £4.95 for 115g, www.carluccios.com



EAT THIS!



LEARN ITALIAN

The best way to learn something is to have fun while you're doing it. That certainly seems to be the theory behind Olly Richards' new book *Italian Short Stories For Beginners*, which features eight unconventional tales to help you master the vocabulary. Olly – writer of the successful blog *I Will Teach You A Language* – only started learning languages at the age of 19, and now claims he can speak eight. So if anyone can turn you into a multilinguist, it's him! £8.99, www.amazon.co.uk

FREE ITALIAN RECIPES APP

Gone are the days when home chefs had to juggle their kitchen utensils with an unwieldy cookbook. Nowadays, there are smartphone apps aplenty to make cooking as easy as pie. One of our favourites at the moment is *Italian Recipes*, which features a wide range of pizza, pasta and even wine recipes from across the country, all accompanied by delectable photos and clear instructions. Just don't drop your phone in the tomato sauce.

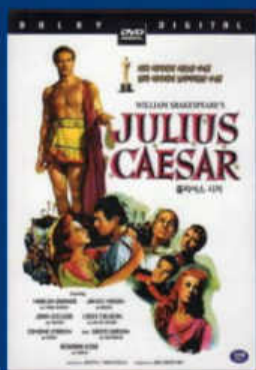
Free, play.google.com



THIS MONTH'S TOP 3...THIS MONTH'S TOP 3...THIS MONTH'S TOP 3...THIS

2 SEE THE STARS IN TOGAS

Marlon Brando received an Oscar nomination for his performance as Mark Antony in the classic 1953 film *Julius Caesar*. But this epic reappraisal of Shakespeare's play is a true ensemble piece, featuring many of Hollywood's biggest stars of the period, including John Gielgud, James Mason and Deborah Kerr. With such lavish sets and costumes, not to mention Brando in a toga, the story of Caesar's last days was never told with such sheen. £3.65, www.amazon.co.uk



3 WEAR IT ON YOUR SLEEVE

The historian in your life will love these Julius Caesar cuff links. Based on an ancient Roman coin found in southwest France, they're made from sterling silver, have the name 'Julius Caesar' engraved on the back, and feature high-end swivels to ensure that they sit neatly on the cuff. Your fella may not have crossed the Rubicon, but with these on his sleeves, he'll be crossing the boundaries of high fashion! £95, www.notonthehighstreet.com



EVENTS IN MARCH 2016

"Springtime is upon us. The birds celebrate her return with festive song, and murmuring streams are softly caressed by the breezes." That's how Antonio Vivaldi saw it – and there is much else to celebrate in Italy this month too...

LA SERVA PADRONA

3, 10, 17, 24 & 31 March
Rome

Rome's historic Throne Hall, in the Palazzo Doria Pamphilj, provides the majestic backdrop for this production of Pergolesi's much-loved opera. When it was first staged in 1733, *La Serva Padrona* broke new ground in the genre with its richly comic undertones. And it still thrills opera lovers today, telling the story of a maid who tricks her master into marrying her. With just five performances in March, it's recommended that you get your tickets early so that you don't miss out. www.romeopera.com/tickets.com

FESTA DELLA DONNA

8 March
Nationwide

Not that you should have to wait for a special occasion to give the lady in your life flowers, but here's one anyway. The Festa della Donna – tying in with International Women's Day – sees the men of Italy shower their beloved women with colourful bouquets, and especially yellow mimosas, do the household chores and take them out to dinner. (Well, they do if they want a quiet life, anyway!) Note that many restaurants offer a special menu today, so book early to avoid disappointment.

FEAST OF SANTA FRANCESCA ROMANA

9 March
Rome

If you're wondering why there's so much traffic in Rome today, it's because it's Saint Frances's Day. She's the patron saint of automobile drivers (due to a legend that an angel always lit the road ahead of her when she travelled), and the city's motorists head to the Piazzale del Colosseo near the church of Santa Francesca Romana to have their cars blessed. You never know, it might just give your rusty old Fiat 500 a new lease of life.

SPRING HOBBY SHOW

11-13 March
Milan

There aren't many environments in the world where gilders might rub shoulders with gamers, and cake makers with comic collectors. But that's the spectacle at this twice-yearly fair in Milan's Fiera, where everyone is welcome, no matter what their favourite pastime. As well as scooping up the very latest products, visitors can enjoy a programme of talks and demonstrations – you might even end up coming out with more hobbies than you went in with! www.hobbyshow.it

PITTI TASTE

12-14 March
Florence

Any event that claims to be dedicated to "excellence in taste and food lifestyles" is going to have your tastebuds tingling with expectation, and this huge annual fair at Florence's Stazione Leopolda doesn't disappoint. Those in attendance – from the visitors to the vendors, not to mention a veritable buffet of industry bigwigs – are passionate about their grub, something that's reflected in the innovative recipe ideas, buoyant demonstrations and lively exchange of ideas. Come along and have your fill. www.pittiimmagine.com

COMMEMORATION OF CAESAR'S DEATH

15 March
Rome

On this day in 44BC, the most famous Roman of them all, Julius Caesar, was assassinated by a group of disillusioned republican senators. But, of course, while they killed the man himself, they could not kill his legend – and every year, Caesar is remembered in the city he ruled and reformed. As well as a host of events in the Roman Forum, there's a re-enactment of his murder at the Torre Argentina archaeological site – if you can stomach it!



Zeppole at the Festa di San Giuseppe

Photograph © iStock

AFFORDABLE ART FAIR

17-20 March

Milan

If there's one thing that's going to set tongues wagging at your dinner party, it's a snazzy piece of art. And you can get your hands on one without having to first consult your bank manager, at this four-day market in Milan's Superstudio Piu. Around 80 international art galleries will be represented, so expect everything from oil paintings to sculptures, interspersed with creative curios that don't really fit into any category. Workshops and live performances enhance the browsing experience. www.affordableartfair.com/milano

FESTA DI SAN GIUSEPPE

19 March

Nationwide

We've already had International Women's Day this month, so it's only fair that the menfolk of Italy are honoured, too. And that's exactly what happens on the Feast Day of Saint Joseph. Joseph was, of course, the father of Jesus, and his day is celebrated by children giving gifts to their dads. Another tradition is the consumption of delicious fried doughnuts called *zeppole*. Decadent it may be, but if you can't let your hair down on your one special day, when can you?

FROM KANDINSKY TO POLLOCK: THE ART OF THE GUGGENHEIM COLLECTIONS

19 March – 24 July

Florence

The Guggenheim galleries in New York City and Venice are recognised as leading lights in the art sphere, so it's something of a coup for Florence's Palazzo Strozzi that it'll be receiving over a hundred masterpieces from the collections to display at this four-month show. As well as the artists mentioned in the title, there will be paintings, sculptures, engravings and photographs by Marcel Duchamp, Max Ernst, Mark Rothko and many more. www.palazzostrozzi.org

PALIO DEI SOMARI

20 March

Torrita di Siena

Ordinarily, a donkey derby isn't the most effective way to get your adrenaline flowing – but the Palio dei Somari is no ordinary donkey derby. No, this annual race in the medieval town of Torrita di Siena, Tuscany, is a boisterous and at times bemusing event that sees jockeys from the town's various neighbourhoods attempt to steer their nags around an intimate circuit as a baying crowd urges them on. With the donkeys regularly unseating their riders or running in the wrong direction, picking a winner is nigh on impossible!

FEAST OF THE ANNUNCIATION

25 March

Florence

The Angel Gabriel's visit to the Virgin Mary, when he informed her that she would be the mother of Jesus, is one of the key moments in the Bible. It's commemorated every year on 25 March, and one of the most lively celebrations happens in Florence, where a colourful parade snakes its way from the Palazzo Vecchio to Piazza SS Annunziata. Upon its arrival, the party starts, with hundreds of revellers enjoying fine food and wine, as well as street entertainers.

27 March SCOPPIO DEL CARRO

Florence

Florence is undoubtedly the place to be on Easter Sunday. Each year, a 30-foot-tall antique cart laden with fireworks is pulled through the city by white oxen and costumed soldiers, before being ignited to provide a lavish light show across the night sky. The tradition dates back more than 350 years, with legend asserting that it assures a good harvest in the local area. Whether that's true or not, it's certainly a spectacle.

Please note that the dates of all events are subject to change. If you plan to attend, check events are going ahead before you travel. All attempts are made to present the correct details.



VIEWPOINT

Anyone who has ever visited the region will immediately recognise this scene as quintessential Tuscany – the green fields, the rolling hills, the **sense of timeless peace** – and those trees...

The Mediterranean Cypress (*cupressus sempervirens*) is as much a symbol of Tuscany as the Duomo of Florence and the Leaning Tower of Pisa. A native of the eastern Mediterranean, here we are in fact at the northwesternmost extent of its natural range, though the tree is now cultivated throughout southern Europe. It will also grow quite happily in many parts of North America, where it is known as the Italian or Tuscan cypress, and even in milder areas of the United Kingdom, where it is often called the 'pencil pine' or 'green pencil'. Particularly in Muslim countries it is sometimes called the black cypress, or the graveyard cypress, because of its ancient association with death and the consequent custom of planting it in and around graveyards. **1**

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LETTERS TO ITALIA!

Share your Italian experiences with us, and tell us what you would like to see in the magazine, by sending your photographs and letters to italia@anthem-publishing.com...

COOKING CLASSES IN ABRUZZO

The November Letter of the Month from Tom McConalogue from Dublin, has inspired me to write to you about my 2015 trip to Palazzo Tour D'Eau in Carunchio, Abruzzo. In particular it was his desire and request to seek out advice from *Italia!* readers on opportunities to further develop his "cooking skills ... in an authentic setting."

For many readers of *Italia!*, I suspect that perhaps, like me, they are armchair-chefs and travellers, getting their Italian cuisine from a jar or the occasional visits to Italian restaurants and "travelling" through magazines and cookbooks. Underlying my regular purchases of *Italia!* is the desire to actually learn how to make Italian food and to learn more about all that makes Italy such a desired travel destination.

For me "Italian food" has been synonymous with family gatherings, diversity of taste, and culture. Those concepts have been reinforced in my trips to Cervinia, Florence, Cinque Terre, Pisa, Rome, Venice, Verona, and most recently Carunchio – and, I might add, within the pages of your magazine.

I have also been intrigued by the *Italia!* property listings and the articles related to putting down roots in Italy. While most often the locations have been in the traditional touristy areas of Tuscany the western regions of Italy, it was nice to see your coverage of reasonably priced properties in Abruzzo, an area that I think is now starting to be "discovered".

What I learned at the Palazzo has helped me break out of my "jarred" Italian meals; to travel to a region of Italy that gets little promotional exposure and is still "fresh"; and to walk the beautiful coastline and beach of Vasto that lies on the Adriatic shore of the east coast of Italy. Equally refreshing were the people-on-the-street that I met in Vasto and the other locations in Abruzzo we toured. The people we met did not display the jaded reactions that I often found in the heavily trafficked areas of Italy. They were cordial and genuinely interested in who we were and what brought us to their community.

Hopefully through your magazine I can encourage anyone interested in learning about Italian cooking or wishing to broaden their cooking skill-set to visit Abruzzo and certainly Palazzo Tour D'Eau. I hope that *Italia!* is able to broaden its coverage of Italy to include more about Abruzzo. The region seems to be a "best-kept-secret" worth sharing. Likewise, I hope that you will include Palazzo Tour D'Eau in your major feature on cookeries. It definitely qualifies as the gateway cookery to the foods and sights of Abruzzo.

Mark Kowalchuk, via email

MONTH LETTER OF THE
MAR 2016

LANGUAGE PROGRAMME

As I opened my January 2016 issue of *Italia!* to my great and most pleasant surprise, I saw on page 65 a picture of a lovely Italian woman with whom I spent two incredibly enriching weeks in her Italian language home stay program in the Piedmont region of Italy.

I am talking about, of course, Lucia Dezuani, whose details for her programme appeared in the Languages section of the magazine.

As I thought about how *Italia!* helped me with spot-on recommendations to use Antonio Manicone (Take a Tour sidebar at page 34 of the Magical Matera *Italia!* issue, August 2015 – an issue so good I bought five copies extra and sent them to friends) I also then thought about another spot-on recommendation I read once in some other *Italia!* subscriber's letter to the editor in an issue from several years ago, where the recommendation was buy a Cicerone guide, *Walking on the Amalfi Coast* (which saved me from getting lost on the walk down from Ravello to Amalfi), and then I thought finally about how I hope some current reader with a passion to learn and improve his/her Italian language skills will benefit from a sincere recommendation to do an in home stay with Lucia Dezuani. It's a solid referral.

Don H. Littleton, Colorado
Thank you for the endorsement, Don. If other readers would like to learn more about Lucia's services, but don't have January's issue to hand, they can find her at www.luciadezuani.com

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MISSED MY FLIGHT (GUIDE)

I notice that in the January and February editions of *Italia!* magazine there are no pages featuring the Italy Flight Guide, What has happened to them as I find them most useful when booking my flights to Italy?

Iris Collett, via email

After much debate we decided to drop the Flight Guide, given the availability of this information online.



Lucia Dezuani offers homestay Italian classes



Kathy Christiansen won our Readers' Photo Competition in December of last year.

PHOTO OF THE MONTH

I have been an avid reader of *Italia!* magazine for a few years. I love the magazine and anxiously await each issue. Just today I received the December issue, and was shocked to see my photo chosen as the winner of the month. My husband and I travelled to Rome and Florence last December, and this is when I took the photo. This was our sixth vacation to Italy, and our favorite city – Florence. Thank you for choosing my photo and I hope to return in the near future. Happy holidays!

Kathy Christiansen, via email

This Reader's Letter has been with us for a while now, but we thought it worth publishing this month, as we approach the new tourist season, to encourage everyone to keep sending us all your wonderful images of Italy in 2016!

CORRECTION

In the February 2016 issue of *Italia!* we incorrectly printed a telephone number for Invitation to Tuscany (page 56). The correct telephone number is +44 (0)20 8444 9500. Visit the company's website at www.invitationtotuscany.com

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GAZZETTA ITALIA!

The British may have given trains to the world but, writes **Tom Alberto Bull**, the railway system in the UK lags far behind Italy in terms of cost, speed and standards of service...

Viaggiare in treno

Negli ultimi tempi il desiderio di rimettere le ferrovie sotto il controllo pubblico è un tema caldo nel Regno Unito. Il costo esorbitante dei biglietti, il servizio carente, il sovraffollamento dei vagoni e i viaggi prolungati sono tutti motivi di malcontento tra i passeggeri e soprattutto tra i pendolari.

Non esistono molti sistemi di trasporto in cui si potrebbe considerare l'Italia più avanzata, ma le ferrovie italiane sembrerebbero nettamente superiori alle nostre. Il servizio ad alta velocità che collega Milano e Napoli esiste da molti anni, con treni che raggiungono i 300 chilometri orari. Questi viaggi non sono economici, ma hanno ridotto tantissimo i tempi di viaggio tra città molto distanti l'una dall'altra, e i treni offrono un ottimo livello di comfort. Si discute da anni della costruzione di una linea simile per collegare le più importanti città del nord del Regno Unito con Londra, ma i ritardi dovuti al processo della pianificazione e ai limiti dei fondi stanziati per il progetto lo hanno fatto slittare a chissà quale data.

Un'altra differenza importante sta nel fatto che in Italia i prezzi dei biglietti rimangono invariati, sia che si prenotano anticipatamente sia che si acquistano il giorno stesso del viaggio. Le tariffe si basano sui tre livelli di servizio – quello locale, quello nazionale e quello ad alta velocità. Io spesso viaggiavo tra Bologna e Milano con il servizio locale (che impiegava circa un'ora di più rispetto al treno nazionale) perché veniva a costare circa la metà – solo €12. In Gran Bretagna la durata del viaggio non fa nessuna differenza, si paga semplicemente il tragitto tra punto A e punto B a seconda della distanza. So bene con quale dei due sistemi mi trovo meglio.

Però non posso sostenere che il sistema è senza problemi... E vorrei avvertirvi di una situazione che fareste bene ad evitare. Un viaggiatore può avere in mano un biglietto validissimo, ma se il biglietto non è stato convalidato prima di salire sul treno il controllore lo può costringere a scendere dal treno o a pagare una multa. Una volta mi era capitato di dimenticare di timbrare il biglietto, e purtroppo me ne sono accorto troppo tardi. A quell'epoca facevo ancora un po' di fatica con la lingua italiana, e quindi ho detto al controllore che non lo capivo. A questo punto lui si è rivolto a tutti i passeggeri nella carrozza e ha detto ad altissima voce 'Questo qua non capisce un tubo!', forse sperando di trovare un interprete disposto ad aiutare. Ho capito benissimo queste sue parole, ma sono riuscito a rimanere impassibile mentre si sforzava di spiegare come funziona il sistema prima di rivelarsi gentile e lasciarmi proseguire il viaggio senza multa.

Allora vi aspettano delle piacevoli sorprese quando userete i 'Trenitalia' – ma per favore non dimenticatevi di convalidare il vostro biglietto!

Travelling by train

The desire to re-nationalise the railway is a hot topic in the UK at the moment. High ticket prices, poor service, overcrowding, and slow journeys are the main reasons for discontent among commuters and travellers alike.

There aren't many instances where one could cite Italy as being more advanced in terms of travel, but when it comes to the railway lines it would seem that they are a few steps ahead. The high-speed service connecting Milan to Naples has been established for a number of years with speeds of up to 300km/h. These journeys don't come cheap but they have significantly reduced the time it takes to travel the length of the country, and the modern trains have been designed with comfort in mind. A similar line in the UK connecting the major northern cities with London has long been discussed but planning delays and budget constraints have meant that we are still some years away from the plans coming to fruition.

Another key difference is that in Italy the ticket prices remain the same, whether you book in advance or purchase on the day of travel. The prices are also based on the three types of service – local, national, and high-speed. I often used to travel between Bologna and Milan using the local line (which took an hour longer than the national) because it worked out at about half the price – just €12. In the UK one must book in advance to avoid astronomical prices and the time the journey takes bears no significance, you are simply charged for getting from point A to point B. I know which system I prefer.

I can't say it's faultless though – and I will warn you to avoid a similar situation. You may have a perfectly valid ticket but if it's not been stamped you can be asked to leave the train or fined. I speak from experience when on one occasion I forgot until it was too late. As my Italian wasn't great at the time I told the conductor that I couldn't understand him, to which he looked around the carriage and shouted 'This person here doesn't understand a bloody thing!', perhaps hoping to find an interpreter ready to help. I understood this part perfectly but just about managed to keep a straight face as he struggled to explain the system before very kindly letting me stay on the train without paying a fine.

So you may be pleasantly surprised when travelling by train in Italy – just don't forget to stamp your ticket! ■



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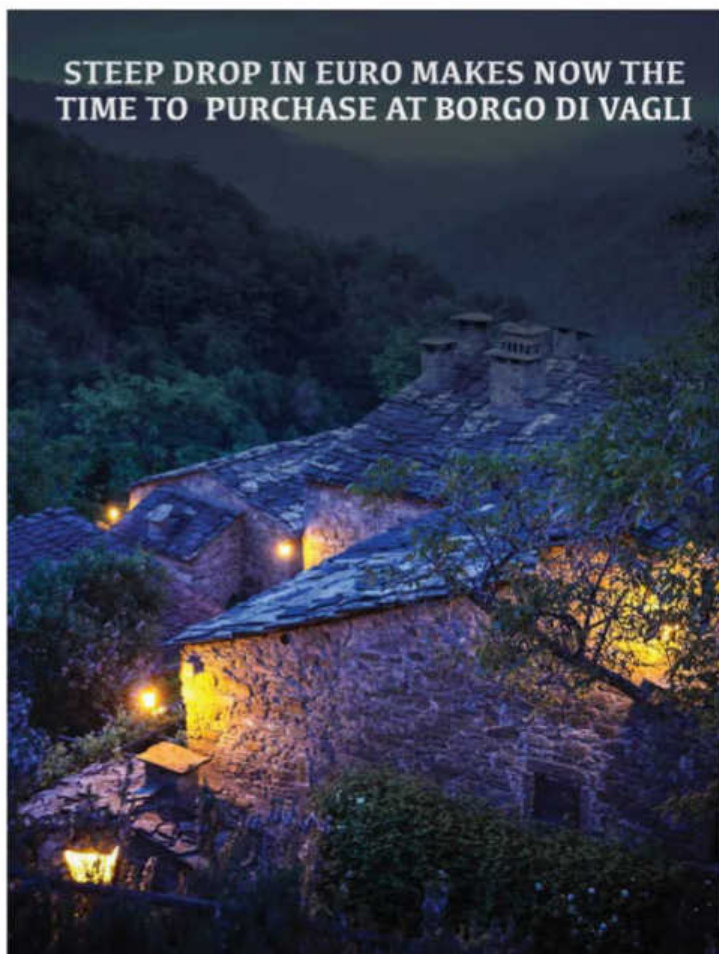
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Homes for Fractional Ownership

Your dream holiday home is worth millions of pounds, but you've only paid a five-figure sum for it. How is this possible? **Fleur Kinson** looks at a safe, straightforward way of buying luxury property in Italy at unimaginably low prices...

Regardless of ups and downs in the wider economy, each of us is always looking for ways to save money. We never want to waste our resources, spend more than we have to, or buy more than we need. This is equally true when we buy a luxury as when we buy a necessity. And yet when it comes to buying a holiday home in Italy (which I'm classing as a 'luxury' but which you would be forgiven for deeming a 'necessity'), many buyers are technically buying a lot more than they will ever need.

They're buying a property they might use for around six weeks a year, but paying the same purchase price as someone who would live in that property full-time. Yes, many buyers mitigate this expense to some degree by offering holiday rentals, but is there another way to substantially reduce your outlay and still get a beautiful home in the sun?

Recent years have seen the continued rise of 'fractional ownership' properties, which aim to do exactly that. They're not for everyone. If what you want is sole possession of a whole property at all times, or the deep satisfaction of restoring an old home to meet your own specifications, then you'd be better off going down the conventional ownership route. But if all you want is a beautiful Italian

holiday home to stay in several times a year and keep as a financial asset, a home worth perhaps ten times what you paid for it, a home whose upkeep and maintenance you'll never have to worry about, then fractional ownership might be for you.

WHAT IS IT?

Let's be clear from the outset that fractional ownership is distinct from 'timeshare' – a word with a lot of negative connotations in the property world. When

you buy into a timeshare property, you merely own the right to spend a certain amount of time there every year for a predetermined number of years. (Unsavory selling practices with these types of properties in 1980s Spain gave them a very bad reputation. You'd be hard-pushed to find any timeshare properties in Italy.) With fractional ownership, on the other hand, you actually and permanently own a share of the property. Your name is on the title deeds with the other co-owners. If the property appreciates in value, so does your share. You can sell your share, leave it in a will, or do anything with it that you could with any other asset. In all this, fractional ownership is very different to timeshare.

The only similarity that exists between fractional ownership

A large swimming pool often comes as standard



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Fractional ownership makes luxury property in areas like the Amalfi Coast much more affordable



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You can expect the kitchen to be stocked with all essentials when you arrive

and timeshare is that access to your property is limited to a certain number of weeks each year – that's why it's so much cheaper than buying a home outright. With fractional ownership, you usually

come with the provision of weekly cleaning. And when you arrive, fridges and cupboards are already stocked for you. In some ways, the system is rather like a cross between a hotel and a private home.

Many fractional ownership properties offer access to a global exchange network

get about four to six weeks, spread across different seasons of the year but always including some peak-season summer weeks.

Bear in mind that four to six weeks is in fact the average amount of time that a conventional buyer spends at his or her fully-owned holiday home in Italy. So if you bought a share of an FO property, you'd enjoy the same amount of usage you'd be likely to if you owned a whole property, but crucially, you'd get to enjoy the run of a far larger and more luxurious home than you could probably ever afford outright.

Note that fractional ownership has other advantages too. All maintenance and repairs of the property are taken care of by its management company. So, unlike a conventional owner, you wouldn't have to worry about the upkeep of the building, the tending of gardens or the cleaning of the pool. You'd never have to face a sudden massive bill to fix the roof or re-fit the kitchen. Many FO properties

Some FO properties (which, by the way, are called 'residence clubs' in America) even provide concierge services. Some can provide cooks and catering, if desired. And if all

Maintenance costs are shared and the administration taken off your hands



this wasn't enough, many fractional properties offer access to a global exchange network, in which you can swap weeks at your property with weeks at properties of similar value in other countries.

HOW DOES IT WORK?

The legal framework behind fractional ownership is that the property's developer establishes the property as a company and the buyers buy shares in that company – or 'fractions' of it. As with all property, ownership is defined by the title deed, which in this case is divided into fractions which carry your name and the names of all the other owners.

Fractions can range from one quarter to one twelfth, and give you the right to spend the corresponding fraction of the year at the property. A typical fraction of an Italian property might be one tenth, which entitles you to five weeks per year there. (Two weeks of the year on a home divided into one tenth shares would be devoted to maintenance work, with no owners visiting at that time.) Obviously, you can buy more than one share in the property if you want to regularly enjoy more time in it.

But which weeks of the year do you get? The usual system is a rotating calendar, which gives you ➤



Max and his wife have an FO property in Tuscany

Photograph courtesy of Max Wenlock

OUR FRACTIONAL OWNERSHIP

Huddersfield-based Max Wenlock and his wife Judy own a one-tenth share of a large farmhouse in Tuscany. They enjoy the run of the whole property for five weeks a year, and are very happy. "Buying a house in Italy was always something that Judy and I said we'd like to do one day," Max explains. "We imagined we'd have to wait until we retired, or came into a fortune or something. But then some friends of ours bought into a really beautiful property in Le Marche, and through them we heard about fractional ownership for the first time. We'd never heard of the system before. Our friends are both lawyers, and Judy and I reasoned that if they thought the system was safe and solid, then it really must be! We did some research, and the more we read about fractional ownership the more sense it seemed to make to us. Because of our work, we weren't in a position to spend more than a few weeks in Italy each year, and neither of us fancied the idea of organising holiday rentals on a house when we weren't there ourselves. We wanted an old property with lots of character, but we didn't want to do any restoration work. Then of course, it was so much cheaper than buying a place outright. For us, fractional ownership seemed like a really good solution.

"Our house sits on a hill with wonderful views across olive groves and sunflower fields. It's so peaceful there; it's magical. We have a large swimming pool and a beautiful garden with fragrant trees to sit under in the shade and have evening drinks or take dinner. It's like an escape into total luxury and relaxation whenever we go there. Like all the other owners, we get two peak-holiday-time weeks and three off-peak weeks each year. We love seeing the place in different seasons and noting all the changes in the surrounding landscape. The allocated weeks system works fine for us, and it's good that all the other owners are flexible and willing to swap weeks if we want to. We've never found it a problem.

"It feels nicer than just renting a holiday home because we know that this house is actually ours, as well as belonging to all the other owners. Our share is an asset, an investment, and we can sell it one day if we ever want to. We've become familiar with the area, made local friends; we're known by the shopkeepers and restaurateurs in the village. It's really lovely. There are always some personal belongings at the house that we don't have to bring from home, and the kitchen is ready stocked with food when we arrive. It's perfect!"



BORGIO DI VAGLI

Type of property Fractional ownership hamlet

Number of bedrooms 1-2

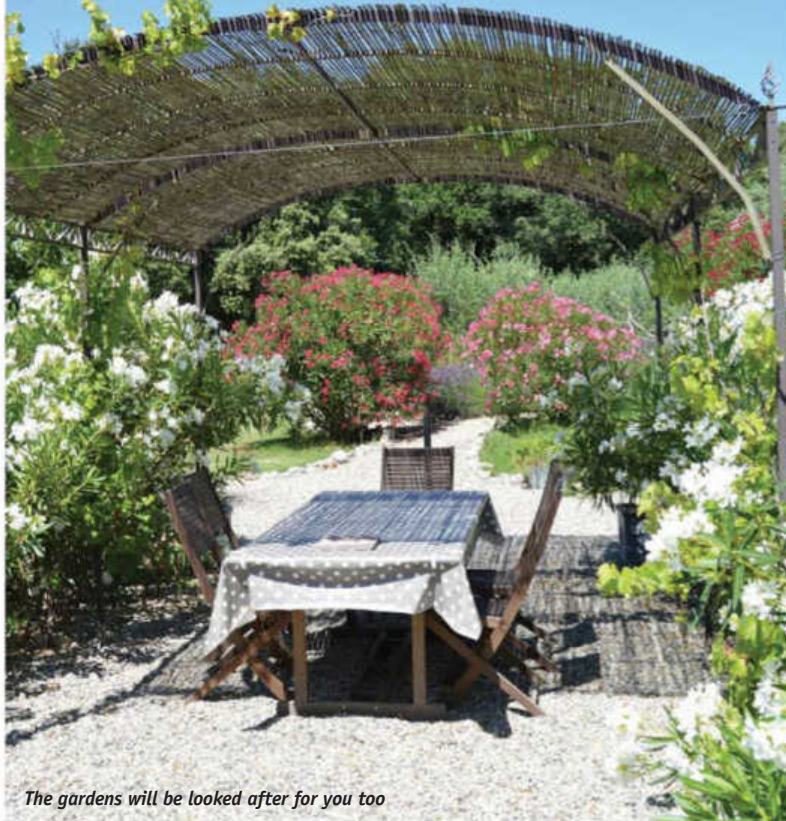
Price €80,500 – €127,000

Location Tuscany

Contact Club Borgo di Vagli ☎ +39 0575 61961

www.clubborgodivagli.com

Nestled deep in the rolling hills of Tuscany with dramatic views of the 1,000-year-old Pierle castle and surrounding olive groves, fruit trees and ancient oaks, Borgo di Vagli is an award-winning fully restored 14th-century Tuscan hamlet available for fractional ownership. Borgo di Vagli is a private, member-owned community. Title to the residences is held by an independent trust company for the benefit of the club owners. Similar to other real estate, ownership may be sold, willed, transferred or placed in a trust at any time. Unlike timeshare, which typically offers the right to use of a specific week and unit, Borgo di Vagli owners enjoy, instead, unlimited and flexible access to the residence. It is designed to be a sensible alternative to second-home ownership and is an investment for life, both from a lifestyle and financial perspective. If you dream of experiencing life in a traditional Tuscan hamlet – consisting of intimate 1- and 2-bedroom homes – then this is a great opportunity. The 10-year restoration project was conceived and executed by the renowned architect Fulvio Di Rosa. Fulvio is often cited by author Frances Mayes as being among the best in his field. His meticulous restoration efforts have allowed Borgo di Vagli to maintain its original feel, atmosphere and charm, without compromising modern-day comforts such as fully equipped kitchens and cosy bathrooms. Fulvio is also responsible for the interiors and his attention to detail is sublime. The property is furnished with rural Tuscan antiques, handcrafted crockery, Busatti linens, satellite television and comes with wi-fi throughout. Amenities include a reception, concierge service, a large, heated outdoor swimming pool, trattoria and endless hiking/walking paths among one of Tuscany's most splendid and peaceful landscapes.



a different selection of weeks each year – with every owner allocated an equal number of peak-season and off-peak weeks. So let's say you have five weeks a year; two of those will always be in the summer and three in other seasons. In practice, the system isn't quite as rigid as it sounds. Usually all the owners in a fractional scheme are very open to the idea of swapping weeks with each other to suit each other's requirements, and can readily contact each other to discuss changes to the calendar.

Despite this flexibility in the system, some would-be buyers aren't

IS IT FOR YOU?

Today, Italy's fractional ownership properties are still mostly found in prestigious central regions such as Tuscany and Le Marche. So if your heart is in the country's far north or south, you might struggle to find one. The properties tend to be lavish, characterful old homes that have been beautifully restored. So, as suggested earlier, they wouldn't suit a buyer whose real dream is to lovingly restore an old tumbledown farmhouse to their specifications.

Fractionally-owned homes are bought perfectly ready to use and full of lovely furniture. You

Usually the owners in a fractional scheme are open to the idea of swapping weeks with each other

suited to fractional ownership. If you're the kind of person who hates planning ahead and who loves to take spontaneous, last-minute trips abroad, the system is obviously going to be a bit too restrictive for you. Families who want to obey the dictates of school holiday dates can be put off by the rotating calendar, but do note that there can be varying systems of week-allocation in different fractional ownership schemes and that you might be able to secure the same weeks every year. (These are called 'fixed weeks' as opposed to the normal 'floating weeks'.)

won't really be able to make any structural or design changes. But for many would-be buyers in Italy, a home with history that requires no building work, new furniture or maintenance is ideal. Many restorers, as well as many owners of centuries-old properties bought ready-restored, underestimate how much general maintenance an old house requires. The fact that periods for maintenance and repairs are built into the annual calendar of a fractional property, and undertaken by its management company, is hugely advantageous.

Stunning Veneto Apartment For Sale



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Golfo dei Poeti

A new villa surrounded by gardens in Lerici...



Below is the actual view from the villa – it can never be obscured

New construction using the finest materials

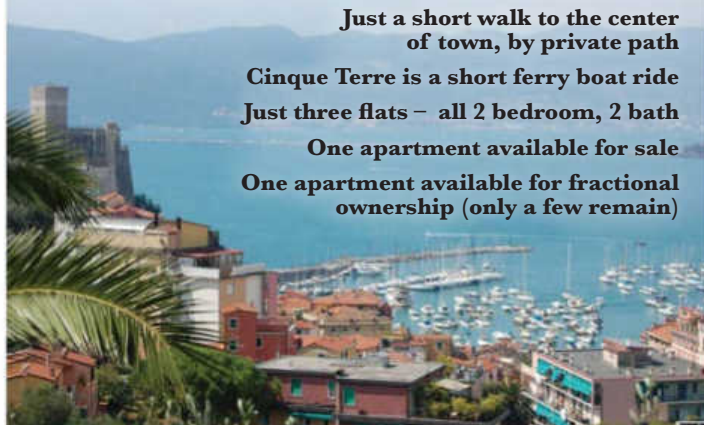
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One apartment available for fractional ownership (only a few remain)



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VILLA GIULIA

Type of property **Flat**

Number of bedrooms **2**

Price **€99,000 per one month deeded ownership**

Location **Lerici, Liguria**

Contact **www.villagiulialerici.com**

Villa Giulia is currently under construction just above the town center in Lerici. The apartment being offered is a 2-bedroom, 2-bathroom unit located on the middle level with unobstructed views from Portovenere to the castle in Lerici. The view can never be obscured by future construction, as dictated by local laws. Finish materials will be of the highest quality, to include a gourmet kitchen and radiant heat throughout, and its design will incorporate the latest available technology for security and connectivity. The flat will be fully furnished with a complete gourmet kitchen, washer and dryer, wi-fi, a music system, and more. The property grounds have been preserved and include olive, fig, apricot, pear, plum, orange and lemon trees. There is a private walkway guaranteed by easement straight to the centre of town. The grocery store is less than three minutes' walk – the return trip takes a bit longer as it is uphill. Construction is scheduled for completion in the spring of 2016. Coastal Liguria is temperate year round. The summers are warm enough for a day at the beach, but cool breezes make the evening pleasant. Winter temperatures never reach freezing – there is no snow or ice, as evidenced by the numerous lemon and palm trees.



Whatever your idea of a dream house is, fractional ownership makes it possible

It's worth spending a moment addressing the issue of exclusivity, of course. If you long to feel that a house is wholly yours and belongs only to you, then fractional ownership isn't the route to go. Emotionally, you need to feel comfortable with the fact that other people have a share in your beloved home in Italy and that they're going to be enjoying it when you're not there. (Of course, many full owners rent their Italian home to holidaymakers for many weeks of the year, so even they aren't enjoying a total exclusivity on their property.)

tools to set about keeping nature at bay; or worse still, worrying about whether the fabric of the building will stand the test of time, shared ownership takes the headache right out of the equation."

DOES IT WORK?

Fractional ownership has been around for a few decades now, and the fact that the system appears to be growing in popularity tends to suggest that people are happy with it and spreading good reports to their friends and family.

John Dillon of RealPoint Italy notes that "In the U.S., fractional

You need to feel comfortable with the fact that other people have a share in your home

Dawn Cavanagh-Hobbs of Appassionata, a specialist in FO properties in Le Marche, says, "Picture yourself, home from home in Italy, returning every year to a property you can really call home, shared with like-minded owners. Collectively you own a beautiful property, each with a one-tenth share, where everyone has five weeks when the property is yours, exclusively, to enjoy however you wish. Unlike sole ownership of a whole house, which can bring its own challenges, like hiring local help, or cranking up the garden

ownership has been used for condo-hotels and villas, but also for private jets and yachts. The system makes a lot of sense. Why would you want the hassle of full ownership with all the costs of maintenance when you only use something for a few weeks per year?" ■

USEFUL CONTACTS

www.appassionata.com
www.realpointitaly.com
www.fractionalexchange.com
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La famiglia... Norwegian style!

One family's search for the perfect home in Le Marche is now coming true, with the help of **Kevin Gibney** of **Property For Sale Marche...**



You hear it all the time in Italy, *la famiglia*, 'the family'. It has a special place in every Italian's heart. It's a concept embraced, too, in the hearts of a Norwegian family of five, the Gimses, who focused on Le Marche in their search for the perfect family home.

"This was always about much more than simply finding a holiday home for friends and family," says

Håvard Gimse. "It was essential that we find a home where our family could be happy, for now and well into the future; a place we'd always want to come back to, even when the kids are grown." Håvard, an internationally acclaimed concert pianist, his wife, Gislaug, a dietitian, and their three children ranging in age from three to nine, wanted a home in Le Marche with family appeal.

Gislaug says, "We felt Le Marche was a great place for a young family like ours and when we met our agent, Kevin Gibney of PropertyForSaleMarche.com, his enthusiasm for Le Marche was incredible, and it was important to us that he had experience not only as a property professional but also as a father of two children living in Le Marche. He understood the family part of it."

"It was clear that Gislaug and Håvard were in this for a lifetime of good times, says Kevin, a Le Marche property veteran. "Sure, it's my business, but one look at their beautiful kids and seeing their commitment, you couldn't not want to be a part of making their dream happen."

Making it happen was quite a process: packing up three young children for property search trips, balancing work and concert schedules, trudging the kids through fields and old buildings along the way. "It was quite an adventure," says Håvard while Gislaug laughs, emphasizing the point. "I loved their energy



*"PropertyForSaleMarche.com is
the best website in our opinion"*

during the visits," says Kevin. "Those kids were indefatigable. The parents hung in there, too!" Håvard smiles and says that once back home in Oslo, the kids asked, "When can we go back to see Kevin again!"

"PropertyForSaleMarche.com is the best website in our opinion and we checked regularly for suitable options," says Gislaug. "Kevin and his team did very detailed estimates on several restoration options and they gave it to us straight." Håvard adds, "I have never had a real estate agent tell me *not* to buy a property, but he did!"

"If I had any doubts on a place, budget-wise or in terms of location for a young family, I told them so," says Kevin.

The team eventually found a house in need of restoration in the Province of Fermo. It's being restored and is due for completion in July. "We are thrilled with the house", says Håvard. "It's perfect for us, now and for the future" – a future that involves using outbuildings to restore cottages for the children to use with *their* families. Gislaug adds, "The long search was worth it and seeing the restoration take shape with the terrific builders and suppliers Kevin recommended is very rewarding."

As for the kids? When asked what they thought of their Italian house, they responded "*Det er bra!*", which is Norwegian for "*Va bene!*" ■



*Gislaug and the
children in Le Marche*



CONTACT DETAILS

► PROPERTY FOR SALE MARCHE

For more information please contact:
Kevin Gibney

Property For Sale Marche

info@propertyforsalemarche.com

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Light and shadows

Called the "Square Coliseum", the Palazzo della Civiltà Italiana was intended by Benito Mussolini as the centrepiece of the 1942 Esposizione Universale Roma

When I first saw it, in the distance at the far end of a wide avenue, it seemed like a mirage: a bright white cube, made of rows and columns of arches. Within each arch was a dark shadow slanting inward, to a mysterious, invisible inner core. Compared with the massive bulk of the architecture surrounding me at my end of the street, it seemed as if the wind might enter the structure through the archways, lift it, and send it spinning away, like Dorothy's house in *The Wizard of Oz*.

It's called the "Square Coliseum", but it's officially the *Palazzo della Civiltà Italiana*. It was intended by Benito Mussolini as the centrepiece of his *Esposizione Universale Roma*, or EUR, the World's Fair in Rome he planned for 1942, to celebrate 20 years of Fascist rule in Italy. The fair never happened, of course. Italy's disastrous decision to enter the war allied with Nazi Germany eventually put an end to all celebrations for the *Fascisti*.

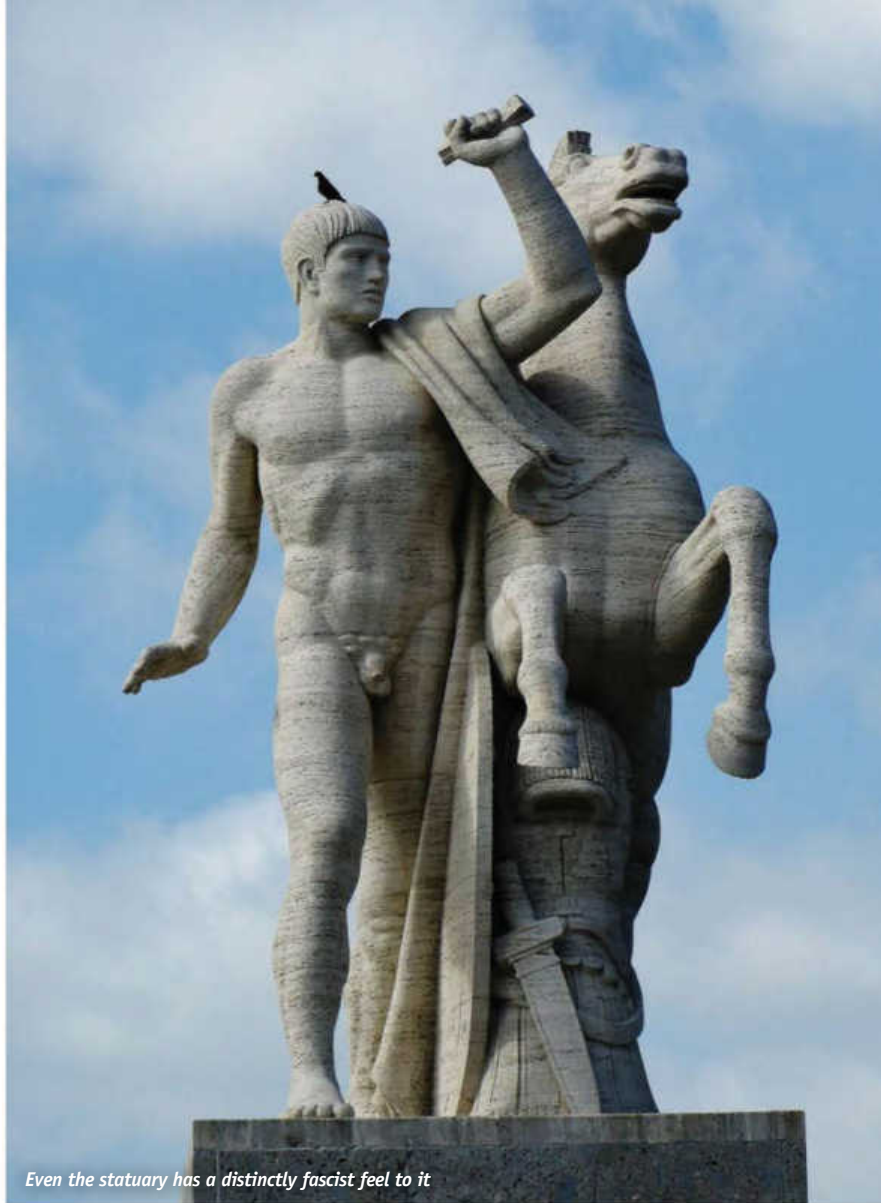
Closer, the illusion of lightness and fragility disappears. It is an enormous building, the largest in the EUR. Made of travertine marble, it is approached by monumental flights of stairs. Four huge sculptural groups stand on the corners of the plinth. The lower arches contain statues representing trades and occupations. There is an inscription in giant lettering across the top of the façade: *UN POPOLO DI POETI DI ARTISTI DI EROI DI SANTI DI PENSATORI DI SCIENZIATI DI NAVIGATORI DI TRASMIGRATORI*: "A nation of poets, artists, heroes, saints, thinkers, scientists, navigators, and travellers".

The inscription, if referring to historical Italy, is stirringly apt. As an expression of *Il Duce's* vision of the glorious Italian future under Fascism, it is a sad remnant of the hubris that led to a nation's tragedy.

The architecture of EUR was to be a modern reinvention of the glories of Imperial Rome. The arches of the *Palazzo della Civiltà Italiana* were to evoke the

The imposing façade of the 'Square Coliseum'





Even the statuary has a distinctly fascist feel to it

Coliseum. Like Trajan's column, the Exhibition Offices bear heroic reliefs. The *Palazzo dei Congressi*'s low dome suggests the Pantheon. The Palazzo dell'INPS (Social Security Office), has a semi-circular façade that suggests Trajan's Market. And so on.

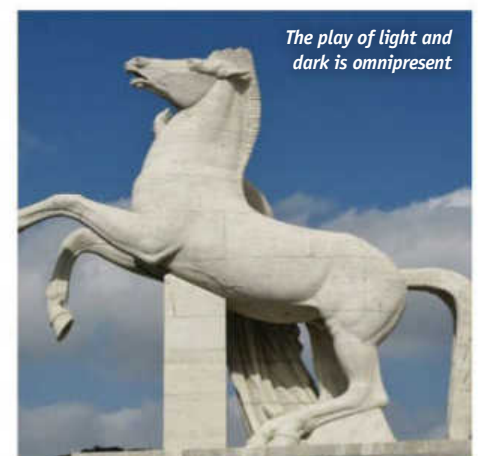
Post-war EUR was a bleak collection of ghostly buildings, abandoned except by squatters. Film makers like Fellini, Rossellini, and Antonioni used them as images of emptiness and alienation. As Italy's economy began to recover in the 1950s, though, EUR gradually became a modern business and residential district. The *Palazzo dello Sport* was constructed as a venue for the 1960 Olympic Games.

But the "Square Coliseum" remained empty for 72 years, fenced to ward off intruders. However, in 2015, Fendi, the famous Roman fashion house, renovated the long-abandoned monument to house their headquarters, with a 15-year lease at €2.8 million per year. The public can visit exhibition spaces and a café located on the ground floor.

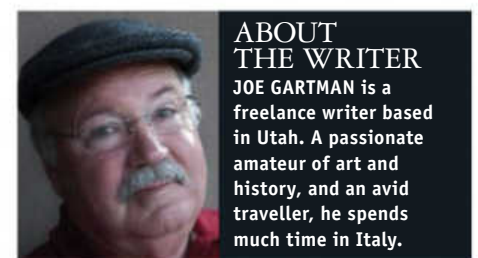
How will it seem when I return? I remember the play of light and shadow gave the deserted building a rather sinister beauty. Will it be less sinister – will it be less beautiful – when the darkness behind the arches is filled, not with lost dreams of Empire, but by jewellery, furs, and expensive handbags? ■



View from the Palazzo dei Congressi



The play of light and dark is omnipresent



ABOUT THE WRITER

JOE GARTMAN is a freelance writer based in Utah. A passionate amateur of art and history, and an avid traveller, he spends much time in Italy.



Photograph © iStock



Clockwise from top left: Cefalù beach; locals enjoying the surf on Panarea; the view over Cefalù from La Rocca; tourists seeing life as it used to be; Monte Vulcano, Stromboli; Cefalù Cathedral; the Lido Apollo in Cefalù; catching rays on the boat to Panarea



48 HOURS IN...

Cefalù and the Aeolian Islands

With nothing particular to do except enjoy the sun, sea and scenery, **James Miller** spent the weekend ambling around Cefalù and venturing out to the neighbouring islands...

There are countless reasons why visiting Sicily is a good idea: natural beauty, historical and cultural interest, food, even romance. As a regular visitor I'm no stranger to any of these. However, in this instance, I'd decided to immerse myself in the island's charms to seek inspiration, clarity and peace from the hectic lifestyle and confusion that goes hand in hand with British living these days. During my time as a correspondent for *Italia!* I'd never embarked upon a trip without a focused itinerary. This time, however, my plan was literally to have no plan, other than to be spontaneous and go with the flow, see where my adventure took me and let this ancient and unpredictable land work its magic!

Following the northwest coastal route, my first stop was the medieval beach town Cefalù. The town is nestled beneath an enormous rocky promontory. The Cathedral's twin peaks poke through the terracotta



Photography © James Miller unless otherwise stated

Photograph © iStock

WHAT TO SEE AND DO

LIDO APOLLO ❶

Cefalù Beach

☎ +39 320 7422265

Enjoy the Cefalù beach lifestyle and relax on the clean and sandy beach. Grab some lunch and maybe a cocktail at the Lido Apollo, which is only two minutes from the town centre. The Lido Apollo has to be experienced if you are here in the summer months, when it is quite the centre of the town's night life. But whenever you visit you will find that the staff are friendly and will service your every need.

CEFALÙ CATHEDRAL

– DUOMO DI CEFALÙ ❷

Piazza del Duomo, Cefalù

☎ +39 39 0921 922021

Cefalù Cathedral is an absolute must-see if you are in town. Indeed, many people came from far and wide just to visit *il Duomo di Cefalù* and see the world-famous Christ Pantocrator. As well as its mosaics and other art, the Cathedral has impressive Norman architecture and beautiful stained glass windows. Take a rest in one the many bars and gelaterias surrounding the Cathedral's piazza. In the evening the atmosphere in the piazza is tranquil and a perfect way to while away the evening with friends.

LA ROCCA ❸

East of Cefalù

If you're feeling energetic, a hike up Cefalù's mountain, La Rocca, is well worth the climb. With breath-taking views and interesting archaeological sites along the way it leads to a jaw-dropping viewpoint and is not to be missed.

STROLL AROUND THE SHOPS ❹

Cefalù

Take a stroll around the speciality gift-shops and browse amongst the exquisite hand crafted ceramics. Cefalù has a multitude of quaint shops to enjoy, from antique emporiums to typical Sicilian hat shops, stocking the traditional Sicilian *coppolla*, or flat cap.

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The view out to sea from Panarea

DON'T MISS

HOLY SAVIOUR FESTIVAL

Events begin on 2 August with the flying of a flag on the cathedral depicting an image of Christ. Later in the day there is the exciting and humorous challenge of retrieving another flag from the sea. The day concludes with fireworks.

rooftops, enticing would-be visitors to stop and explore this ancient and picturesque little Sicilian town.

I checked into the hotel closest to the beach, the Riva del Sole. And without wasting any of the glorious Sicilian sunshine I went straight to the beach. I ventured into the lively beach bar the Lido Apollo. I ordered an Italian beer and got chatting to the bar staff and lifeguards. In no time at all we were getting on like old friends and I'd been invited to join

the glorious but intense Sicilian sun. Amongst the art and antique shops there was plenty to look at.

I arrived at the main *piazza*, it was a site to behold, the Norman cathedral at the top dominating the beautiful square lined with cafés and restaurants. The exotic appearance of the cathedral is part of Cefalù's legacy as a Norman stronghold. Roger II, so the story goes, survived a storm and landed on Cefalù's beach. So grateful was he for his

I decided to enjoy the typically Sicilian way of eating ice cream, gelato in a brioche!

them in the evening. They explained how much they loved the lifestyle in Cefalù. Toto, the lifeguard, had lived in Miami for a while but to him and his friends there was nowhere that offered the simplicity and sincere friendships that were all in Cefalù.

After enjoying the beach with the Lido Apollo bunch, I decided to take a stroll through Cefalù's quaint streets. The cool shade of the medieval streets offered a respite from

salvation, Roger commissioned the cathedral's construction. The piazza and cathedral are the pride of the town and in the evening, when the cathedral is illuminated, the scene is quite magnificent.

I decided to cool down and enjoy the serenity of the piazza, with a typically Sicilian way of eating ice cream, *gelato* in a brioche! I met some locals in the *gelateria* who were organising a sailing excursion



Embarking at Panarea



The church at Panarea

Photograph © iStock



Panarea harbour



Tourists enjoying ice cream in the shade

around the nearby Aeolian Islands. I jumped at the chance to island hop around Sicily's famous volcanic archipelago and agreed to meet with them the following day.

After an exhilarating morning's sailing we arrived at the island of Panarea. The experience was like stepping into a timeless paradise. The shimmering blue water and view of the volcano in the distance were breath-taking. I stopped to get some lunch before exploring the island further. The little harbourside restaurant was frozen in a time where romance and *la vita bella* were the order of the day. The charming waitress seemed to genuinely enjoy the sight of another spellbound customer at one of her tables. I sat outside and enjoyed a delicious bowl of local seafood pasta and white wine. This is a place where romantically intertwined couples can allow *vero amore* to blossom whilst isolating themselves from the rest of the world. I allowed myself to drift into the ambience and natural beauty of the island. The restaurant owners were playing slow, smooth melodies from the 1940s and '50s on their

radio. The moment had something of a dreamlike quality. I looked out at the harbour, the volcanic island in the distance billowed out wispy puffs of smoke into the cloudless blue sky. Fishing boats bobbed lazily in the harbour. It was serene, unspoilt, and beautiful. It was as though the rest of the world didn't exist, or at least for this moment didn't matter.

I walked slowly upward through the narrow, flower-lined streets. The midday heat was becoming intense and a brief respite was in order. I found a small church at the top of a hill with spectacular views over the island and blue horizon. A breeze brushed the back of my neck and the only sounds were that of birdsong and children playing in the distance. It was the perfect location for a moment of calm reflection.

I took in a few more sights before departing for the next island. Sun-kissed locals were leaping off volcanic rock into the sea. Later I lay by the harbour listening to the waves gently lap the stones, watching Mount Vulcano puff white wispy plumes into the air. This is a place that seems to exist outside ➤

DON'T MISS

FESTIVAL OF FIRE
The volcanic island of Stromboli has been hosting the annual festival of fire since 2008. This flame-filled event sets tourists' and locals' worlds ablaze for two weeks every summer from the last Saturday of August.

WHERE TO STAY

HOTEL RIVA DEL SOLE 6

Lungomare Giardina, 25 – Cefalù

☎ +39 0921 421 230

info@rivadelsole.com

www.rivadelsole.com

The Riva del Sole occupies a prime location on the beachfront. The staff are friendly and the hotel is a stone's throw away from the town centre. Breakfast is a pleasant experience in the bright and airy courtyard. The rooms have great sea views. The Riva del Sole offers good value for money and comes recommended.

OLAS DEL MAR – B&B CEFALU 7

Via Bellini, 7 – Cefalù

☎ +39 380 285921 ☎ +39 338 285 8372

nemini1@outlook.it

www.olasdelmarcefalù.com

This family-run B&B offers outstanding value for money. The rooms are minimalistic, stylish and impeccably maintained. The rooftop terrace offers amazing views to the sea and the owners are on hand to help at all times. The B&B is run with a real sense of professionalism and pride. Highly recommended.

MY SUN HOUSE – HOLIDAY APARTMENTS AND VILLAS 8

Various addresses within Cefalù depending upon selection

☎ +39 333 228 3626

www.housecity.com

Run by Cefalù local Francesco Termini, this company offers a range of accommodation from studios to apartments to villas. The service is excellent and there is something to suit all budgets. Francesco is always happy to help and ensures his guests have the best stay possible.

ALBERI DEL PARADISO 9

Via dei Mulini, 18/20 – Cefalù

☎ +39 0921 423900 ☎ +39 0921 440596

www.alberidelparadiso.it

This hotel is situated on the outskirts of town. Nestled in amongst olive trees and orange groves, it is an idyllic location for a holiday in Cefalù. Away from the hustle bustle of town it is a real sanctuary after a day exploring the ancient streets of the town centre. Definitely worth a visit.

ARTEMIS HOTEL 10

Via Roma, 101 – Cefalù

☎ +39 0921 421330

Artemis is a renovated convent, it has a distinctive style that acknowledges its historic roots whilst offering up to date service and facilities. Customer satisfaction is observed at all times in the Artemis. Artemis is an economical option that doesn't concede on service standards. Well worth considering when visiting Cefalù.

WHERE TO EAT

MASQUENADA 11

Via Discesa Paramuro, 5/7 – Cefalù

☎ +39 320 813 8208

Masquenada is known to be one of the best spots for nightlife in the area, it has a lively clientele in the evenings and the atmosphere is fantastic. To really enter into the spirit of Cefalù partying in the summer, Masquenada has to be experienced. Pop in for something to eat and a mojito and you won't be disappointed.

€ € €

LA BRACE 12

Via XXV Novembre, 10 – Cefalù

☎ +39 0921 423570

www.ristorantelabrace.com

This restaurant has tasteful décor with a tantalising menu that doesn't disappoint its clientele. Popular both with locals and tourists. There is a relaxed and welcoming ambience and the staff aim to please at all times. The Chef takes great pride in producing great food and using quality ingredients. A little gem.

€ €

KENTIA AL TRAPPITU 13

Via C.O. di Bordonaro, 96 – Cefalù

☎ +39 0921 423801

ristorantekentia@gmail.com

www.kentiaaltrappitu.it

This popular restaurant has a terrace by the sea that is a real hit for romantic evening meals enjoying the sounds of the waves whilst eating the delicious food the restaurant is famous for. The price is very reasonable and the interior is very stylish and elegant.

€ €

LA BOTTE 14

Via Veterani, 20 – Cefalù

☎ +39 0921 424 315

www.labottecefalù.com

This family run restaurant offers excellent cuisine at reasonable prices, although its usually busy due to the quality of food and service so it's a good idea to book a table. It's situated in one of Cefalù's quaint side streets so is easy to miss, although spending an evening in here enjoying the local produce is a memorable experience.

€ €

CARDILE GIOVANNI 15

Via Lani, 1 – Panarea

☎ +39 090 98055

This amazing little eatery has pride of place on the island of Panarea's harbour. The atmosphere is sublimely relaxed. Enjoying a bowl of seafood pasta and wine here whilst watching the puffs of smoke from a nearby volcanic island is the way to enjoy island life and the food is delicious.

€ €



DON'T MISS

CASTELBUONO

Within easy reach of Cefalù is the delightful town of Castelbuono. The town is named after its beautiful Arab-Norman castle that sits atop a rocky outcrop dominating the town's skyline. To fully appreciate the island's varied history during the age of empires this must be experienced.

► **KEY TO RESTAURANT PRICES**
(full meal per person, not including wine)

€ Up to €25

€ € €26-€50

€ € € More than €50

of time, and for a while I was happy to forget about the past and the present and exist purely in the here and now.

Later that afternoon our boat moored at Stromboli harbour. The first thing that struck me was the hotchpotch of colourful fishing boats strewn across the black pumice and volcanic sand. Families enjoyed the sun with a dip into the surf.

Stromboli received international fame through the film of the same name, directed by Roberto Rossellini and starring Ingrid Bergman. Released in 1950, it is now considered a masterpiece in Italian neo-realism. Bergman plays a foreigner living on the island and experiencing extreme isolation and claustrophobia. Her anxieties accentuated by the looming threat of a volcanic eruption. I sat down and contemplated the reality of the remote but far from claustrophobic lifestyle of these islanders. I walked up the narrow, winding street towards the main piazza. Boutique shopkeepers, dressed in linen, were leaning barefoot on their stoops. It had a free-spirited, bohemian feel to it. At the top of the hill was a piazza and a pizzeria with views out to the

sea. I indulged in another bowl of local pasta and a glass of white wine. This was a place like no other I'd experienced in Italy. Not fashionable or glamorous but it didn't need to be. It felt like the sort of place you could find yourself visiting and never returning from. The island had a slow and soothing rhythm dictated by the gentle metronome of the waves lapping against the shore. I walked back down and lay on the jetty waiting for the boat to return.

The experience of visiting the Aeolian Islands had been almost surreal, intoxicating. Unlike Karin, Ingrid Bergman's character in the film *Stromboli*, I didn't want to leave this entrancing corner of the Mediterranean. I knew one day I would return.

Later that evening our boat dropped anchor just off the shore of an active volcano. The light was subdued and atmospheric, and our boat rocked gently in the shadow of this brooding giant as we waited for a glimpse of its elemental power.

It was now the middle of the night and my new friend Toto had offered to pick me up in Cefalù. I was expecting a car but, true to the *vita libera* the locals enjoy, I ended



A secluded sunbathing spot



The beach at Stromboli

up whizzing through the streets, helmetless in the dead of night, on his Vespa scooter – just the adrenaline jolt I needed after the tranquilizing combination of sun, sea, beautiful Mediterranean islands, volcanoes and drinks on the boat.

THE GODDESS DIANA

The ancient inhabitants of Sicily built a temple on La Rocca and dedicated it to a beautiful goddess from antiquity. The Romans called her Diana, she was known as Artemis to the Greeks. I'd heard that the mountain here was said to be a place of inspiration and ancient magic. I was intrigued. It was the start of a new day and before leaving Sicily I couldn't resist a trip up to the summit to find some answers.

After an energetic scramble, I sat on the ruined battlements at the peak. The refreshing, cool wind blew across my face. I could hear the waves rhythmically rolling into the shore beneath. I pondered upon the powerful allure they must have felt towards their feminine deity – enough to have created a sacred place to honour her.

I felt an affinity to their passions. I wondered how this goddess must have appeared in their furtive imaginations. In my mind's eye, I saw large, shimmering, blue eyes, crystalline and mesmerising, much like the endless blue sea – graceful, with a beauty matched by none. Although, despite her feminine beauty and elegance, her character was fiercely strong and independent.

This female deity had a particular relevance for woman wanting to bear

children, as she was the patron goddess for conceiving and childbirth. As the classical story goes, there was a man who fell upon her gaze. Bewitched, he thought she was his perfect lover. But he is tragically thwarted by her absolute unattainability. True to the spirit of the classical myths of antiquity, where there is beauty there is also suffering...

I mused upon this ancient drama as I made my descent back into the town. The views were spectacular all the way down and I savoured them knowing that my time in Sicily was coming to an end. I came to Sicily with no real plans other than to go with the flow and let the island work its magic. After experiencing the staggering beauty of the Aeolian Islands, hanging out with vivacious locals and experiencing the mystique of La Rocca, I can say that I am truly spellbound. ■

GETTING THERE

► BY PLANE

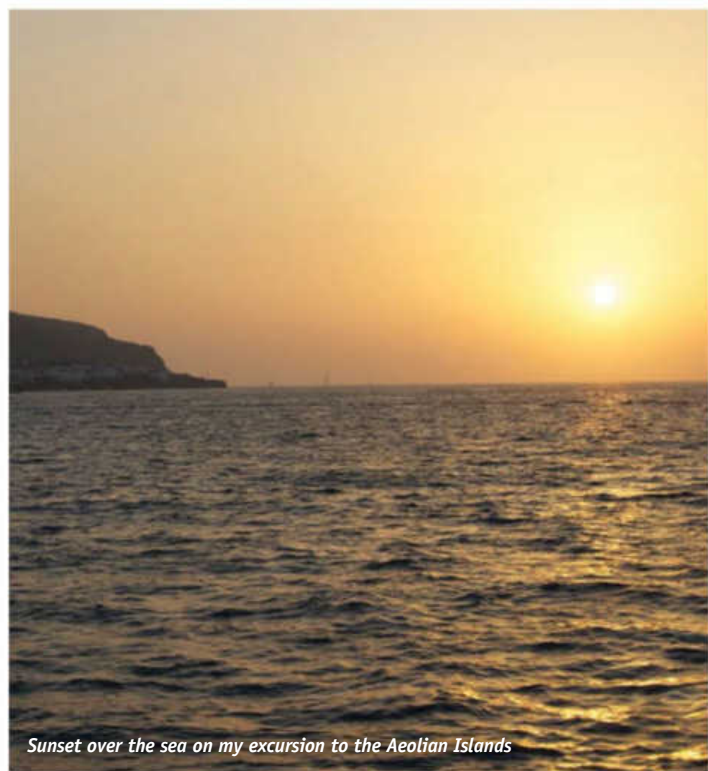
Cefalù lies on the northern coast of Sicily, to the east of Palermo. You could fly in to Catania or Comiso and drive across the island but you will be doing yourself a huge favour if you can get a flight to Palermo. Easyjet flies there from Gatwick, while Ryanair has services from Stansted and Dublin.

► BY TRAIN OR BUS

Get the shuttle bus from the airport into Palermo and take a train or a bus to Cefalù from there. If you are travelling with friends, or you simply don't want the hassle of public transport, a taxi might cost about €100.



Fishing boats and Vespas – the transport of choice!



Sunset over the sea on my excursion to the Aeolian Islands

The Peggy Guggenheim Collection in Venice

Peggy Guggenheim lived the last three decades of her life in Venice and opened her home as an art gallery

American by birth and internationally renowned in the art world, Peggy Guggenheim (1898-1979) was made an honorary Venetian citizen by *La Serenissima* and was the last resident in the city to have a private gondola. She lived the last three decades of her life in Venice and opened her home a few times a week as an art gallery to visitors. Her collection showcased the most important European and some American art movements from the early 1900s, starting with Cubism and going up to – but not including – Pop Art, a movement she loathed.

She was an extraordinary woman, strong, curious and a pioneer in the art and gallery world. She was a great friend to, and a collector of, some of the people who are now considered to be the most important names in art from the beginning of the 20th century. She married twice, both times to artists – and both were fairly unhappy relationships. Laurence Vail (Paris-born to American parents) was her first husband and father to her two children. She met him in her early 20s and he introduced her to the avant-garde artistic and literary circles in Paris. He was a writer and sculptor of the Dada movement. Her second husband was Max Ernst, an American like herself and one of the forerunners and key artists of the Surrealist movement.

Peggy opened a gallery in London called *Guggenheim Jeune* where temporary exhibitions were organised of contemporary new artists. The gallery was cutting-edge and progressive (it held the first show of Wassily Kandinsky in England) but it ran at a loss and so she decided to try collecting rather than organising shows. Herbert Read, an English art historian and friend, drew up a list of artist names that she needed to have in her collection if she wanted to create something that resembled an anthology of art movements in her lifetime. It began with



View out to the Grand Canal



Joan Miró, Dutch
Interior II, 1928



Peggy's throne



Freya with the museum sign –
Grand Canal entrance



Paul Klee, *Portrait of Mrs P in the South*, 1924



Pablo Picasso, *On the Beach*, 1937

Cubism. She went to Paris and dedicated herself to buying a painting a day.

She wanted to have a truly modern collection and so the earliest work in the collection is *The Poet* (1911) by Picasso, done at the height of Cubism, and then it continues with the major artistic styles of the following 60 years (Futurism, Surrealism and Abstract Expressionism). With the outbreak of the Second World War she had to flee Europe with her collection. She returned to New York, the city of her birth, where she opened the *Art of This Century* gallery, which proved to be a great success. During this period she discovered Jackson Pollock and became the first person to show his work.

In 1948, Greece was in civil war and their national pavilion was to remain empty at that year's Venice Contemporary Arts Biennale. The space was offered to Peggy for her collection during the Biennale months. Thus began the Venetian chapter of her life, and her collection remained there after her death. The following year, in 1949, she moved into a wonderful, one-storey *palazzo* on the Grand Canal, the Palazzo Venier dei Leoni, a stone's throw from La Salute church in the area of Dorsoduro. The house, dating to the 18th century, was, mysteriously, never built beyond the ground floor. Peggy took advantage of the flat and easily accessed roof space to house memorable parties.

After unsuccessfully offering her collection to the Italian state, she left her estate to her late uncle Solomon R. Guggenheim's foundation in New York. This despite the fact that Peggy and Solomon had been not been on good terms. (Among other things, the abstract art collector thought Surrealism was a disgrace.)

The paintings in the Venice museum are hung all through the house and the sculptures are placed all over the garden. Peggy's ashes are in the garden, along with the remains of her 14 beloved Lhasa Apso dogs. There is a lovely café in the garden, the views from the house onto the Grand Canal are wonderful, and the whole area is quiet, peaceful and calming. It is so easy to imagine the heiress with a prosecco in hand, wearing a Mariano Fortuny Delphos gown and calling after her favourite doggy whilst gliding to her gondola shed (now gallery space) for a whirl on the water. ■



ABOUT THE WRITER

FREYA MIDDLETON is a private tour guide and writer who lives in Florence, Tuscany. You can read her blog online or learn more about her tours at www.freyasflorence.com

Photography © Freya Middleton

Throughout the past year we sampled Italian products you can buy in the UK in our *Buy Italia!* feature and brought you our recommendations. Now we can tell you what our favourites have been. And here they are, at the...



2015 ITALIA! TASTE AWARDS

Now that we've got the old year properly packed off to bed and tucked up nicely – and even the farthest-flung of our readers have had the chance to write and comment on the December issue (see Letters, page 19) – it is time to round up the best Italian food products it was our privilege to sample over the course of the past year.

All these products are available for purchase in the UK – albeit some only via online orders, some only in certain regions or towns, some generally across the country but by no means everywhere, and some freely in any branch of the major national supermarket chains.

If you would like to read more about the products featured here, but you don't have the relevant issue to hand, go to our website at www.italytravelandlife.com and click on Food & Wine, then *Buy Italia!*



EDITOR'S CHOICE
SEPT
2015
ITALIA!

BEST OLIVE OIL TENUTA MARMORELLE 'ZERO'

From Tenuta Marmorelle
www.tenutamarmorelle.com
Price £14.95 for 500ml

At *Italia!* we are fortunate enough to get to taste many different olive oils from all corners of Italy over the course of a calendar year, but we can safely say that this was our favourite in 2015. There's something about that Sicilian sun that brings extra flavour out of an oil.

Some extra virgin olive oils can be over-pungent – full of flavour, yes, but overpowering to the point of distracting you from the tastes of the food you're dressing. The best oils demonstrate balance and finesse, and the Zero oil – which harks from Puglia – manages to maintain the perfect balance between flavour and strength. It has bold, fruity flavours (strawberries, rosemary, even a touch of clove), but no matter what you use it with it maintains a unique precision of clarity and is the perfect complement to salads, cheeses, griddled steaks, barbecued fish – pretty well anything, in fact. But to sample it in its purest form, simply dip in a piece of the finest-quality bread (indeed, it's great with chargrilled *ciabatta*.)

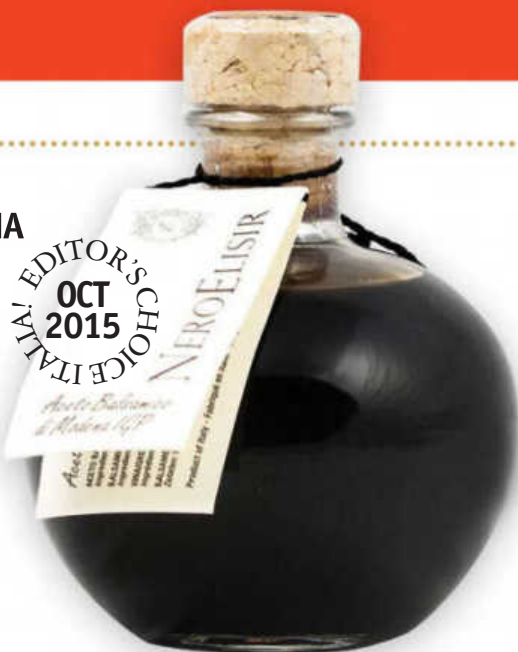


BEST BALSAMIC VINEGAR MANICARDI NERO ELISIR ACETO BALSAMICO DI MODENA

From Something Italian
www.something-italian.com
 Price £24.00

Balsamic vinegars can cost anything from a couple of quid to several hundred pounds a bottle. In any judgement on a 'favourite of the year' such considerations must be made. At 'just' £24 a bottle we'd suggest this example offers exceptional value for money.

Although they are not pictured here, this fantastic vinegar comes boxed with a stopper/pourer and even a tiny (5cm x 5cm) book of recipes that the vinegar can be incorporated into. The quality of this particular balsamic rises well above its superb presentation however. Although not particularly 'thick' or viscous it does have a magnificent depth of flavour. The cooked grape must adds a great deal to what's going on here – it gives this vinegar body and substance. We sampled it both mixed with our favourite olive oil – it works brilliantly with lightly toasted *ciabatta* – and drizzled over a simple tomato and green leaf salad. It worked supremely well on both counts. One of the best we've ever encountered.



BEST WHITE WINE 'SHARIS' RIBOLLA GIALLA & CHARDONNAY 2014, LIVIO FELLUGA

From Liberty Wines
www.libertywines.co.uk
Price £19.99

When you think of Italian wines you immediately think of the big names in red from Tuscany, Piedmont and Veneto – but Italian white wine is improving dramatically, and choosing a favourite from the many, many bottles we opened at our regular tastings in 2015 caused no end of argument... In the end we settled for this, our 'Discovery of the Month' in August. It is quite an extraordinary wine for the money.

Livio Felluga's vineyards are located across the coveted Collio and Colli Orientali sub-zones within Friuli – which is as good a place as any to start in the region when it comes to growing grapes. Low yields and high quality go on to produce great wines, such as this blend of the local ribolla gialla grape variety with chardonnay (grown pretty well everywhere). The result? Opulence in a glass! Rich, though medium-bodied, it's both floral and fruity.

DISCOVERY OF THE
MONTH
AUG
2015



BEST PRESERVED AND JARRED VEGETABLES PEPERONCINI LOMBARDI CURLY GREEN CHILLIES IN BRINE

From Jamie's Italian delis
(not available online)
Price £6.50 for 300g

There is, it has to be said, nothing quite like lifting produce straight from the ground it was grown in and taking it directly to the kitchen, but very few of us actually live like that. Going to market for the freshest produce is next best, but in terms of pure nutritional value, there is usually absolutely nothing wrong with using preserved and jarred vegetables. And, let's face it, if we have another summer like 2015, there is no way you are going to be able to grow chillies like this in the UK this year!

Be warned: these are hot. Not 'blow your head off' hot, but you certainly know when you've taken a bite – eating whole chillies in one go is not recommended! These chillies from Lombardy have a really pleasing sourness to them, making them ideal both as an aspect of an antipasti selection and as a topping for pizza or as an ingredient in a simple pasta sauce. You could try dicing them or even blending them and mixing them with pesto for a pasta dish with a kick, or just chop them up and mix them with fresh tomatoes and slices of salami. Matching them with wine is pretty well impossible. If you're going to have a drink with them, we'd suggest a very dry martini over lots of ice.

EDITOR'S CHOICE
ITALIA!
MAR
2015



BEST DRIED PASTA CIPRIANI PAPPARDELLE

From Something Italian
www.something-italian.com
Price £6.45 for 250g

It is believed that the art of drying pasta was brought to Italy via Sicily, by traders from North Africa, who may or may not have stopped off in Greece on their way over. Whatever the truth, the art has been in constant practice for 1,000 years now – and it's working out pretty well...

The Cipriani name is synonymous with Harry's Bar in Venice, opened in 1931 by Giuseppe Cipriani using money granted to him by Bostonian Harry Pickering. The family has been serving quality food (and, of course, drinks) ever since, and now has its own food brand. These *pappardelle* are, quite simply, amazing. They only need a few minutes to cook (well, four, but ensure you don't overdo it), and have a lovely silky texture as well as a firm, though not at all nutty, bite. They hold a sauce perfectly, thanks to a slight 'roughness', and work really well with tomato-based ragù. We tried them with the Cipriani Bizantina sauce. Delicious.



EDITOR'S CHOICE
ITALIA!
AUG
2015

BEST RED WINE

CARIGNANO DEL SULCIS RISERVA 'ROCCA RUBIA' 2012, CANTINA SANTADI

From Great Western Wine
www.greatwesternwine.co.uk
Price £19.95

DISCOVERY OF THE MONTH
NOV 2015

Yes, it would be easy for us to say 'Barolo' and leave it at there, but we know that what you want from these pages is an insight into Italian wines you might not hear about elsewhere. Unlike some people, we do not review wines according to how much money they spend on advertising, but simply according to how much we like what's in the bottle. And we liked this Sardinian red. A lot. At £20 a bottle it's a snip.

Our favourite red wine from Sardinia? Terre Brune from the Santadi co-operative. But it's expensive (£38 a bottle from GWW). Rocca Rubia is hardly a 'baby brother', more of a maturing teenager, with a rich nose and a creamy palate, an abundance of fruit and a powerful kick. This wine is Sardinia in a glass, and demands to be drunk with traditional Sardinian dishes. Give it a try this summer with suckling pig!



BEST GRISSINI

CARLUCCIO'S SANDOLIVA GRISSINI WITH OLIVE OIL

From Carluccio's stores
Price £2.25 for 130g

EDITOR'S CHOICE
MAY 2015

Carluccio's have earned an honest reputation now for supplying high-quality produce from selected outlets in their nationwide chain of restaurants. This produce is never cheap – you will often be paying double what you might pay in a supermarket for a comparable item – but the quality is always reliably high. They consistently do very well in our taste tests and these breadsticks were voted best in class as we enjoyed our vermouths at a team dinner late last spring. And, no, they don't advertise with us either. (Though we do get free breadsticks!)

These (reasonably well-priced!) *grissini* from Carluccio's are every bit what you'd expect them to be. Made with olive oil they're rich in taste and yet have the perfect 'snap' and a perfect crunch in the mouth. They don't taste too yeasty, but have enough power to pronounce them authentic, unlike many of the so-called Italian breadsticks you'll encounter in the supermarket. They taste wonderful on their own, although also work well when used for dipping. Try slow-roasting an aubergine, scooping out the insides, and blending (using a hand blender) with fresh garlic, salt, pepper and olive oil. Alternatively, enjoy with chilli oil or home-made guacamole, if you have a palate for hot tastes! Some of the best *grissini* we've come across in the UK, and certainly the best in 2015.



BEST TINNED CHOPPED TOMATOES

CIRIO CHOPPED TOMATOES AUTENTICO ITALIANO

From Various supermarkets
Typical price £1.00

If you are starting out learning how to cook Italian, or you feel you have lost your way and you want to get back to basics and build again, you will not go far wrong by reappraising the skill of making a tomato sauce. It is the basis of so many Italian dishes, the length and breadth of the country – not least, of course, the iconic pizza. Now, some people say that the pizza was invented in the United States; that it was actually imported back from the New World to the Old. It was not. It was invented in Naples. But we do, however, have to thank the New World for the base product: the tomato. You can find lots of good ones in a tin, and these work better than fresh in any kind of sauce. Napolina's are very good, as are Tarantella's and those from the Co-op. But these from Cirio are the best, in our opinion.

Whereas some tinned chopped tomatoes can be a tad 'mushy', these tomatoes from Cirio have a great definition and provide an initial firm bite. They're sweet, though not overly so, and make a really smooth beef sauce. There's certainly no need to add extra sugar here. We'd suggest that these tomatoes be cooked over a low heat for a prolonged period, which will help to meld a smoother ragù.

EDITOR'S CHOICE
JULY 2015



BEST ROSÉ WINE

LE POZZELLE, SALICE SALENTINO ROSE 2013, FRANCESCO CANDIDO

From Great Western Wine
www.greatwesternwine.com

Price £10.25

We return to the subject of wine... This time rosés (or 'blushes', as they are known to our American cousins). Now, Italy isn't the first country you think of when you think of rosé wines, France is. But, the increasing popularity of white wines like Pinot Grigio, and the advance of stainless steel, has caused Italian producers to be brave and branch out a little, and this has led to the development of a very promising new line. This was our 'Discovery of the Month' last June – just in time for the summer season! – and it represents extremely good value at this price, and there were others too...

This is another rosé that harks from the Salento area of Puglia where, especially in 2013, the sun was warm and the grapes well ripened when it came to harvest time. This is a rosé wine that is more complex than most. Dry, yes. Crisp, yes. But it also has a richness of character – all succulent strawberry – that betters many of its peers. And at just over £10 a bottle from GWW, this is an absolute bargain. Snap it up!

DISCOVERY OF THE
 MONTH
 JUNE
 2015



BEST DELI

ALESSANDRO'S, DERBY

We are always happy to hear when a new Italian deli crops up, and we will always try to support independent entrepreneurs bringing the best of Italy to the UK. Take a bow, Carol Phillips!

When Carol Phillips was made redundant, she decided to take the plunge and follow her heart by "bringing a little bit of Italian sunshine to Derby". Following advice from Abruzzo locals, she researched and selected products from small producers, all of whom she knows personally. "Our pasta comes from a tiny Abruzzo family producer based in the mountains there," explains Carol. "They've been making pasta for three generations and there are only three people who do this!" She also stocks a selection of jams and honeys from the village of Giuliano in a very green part of the region, famous for its cherry festival in the month of June. Other specialities include some large mortadella, caciocavallo, and other niche cheeses. She has an ever-growing clientele of foodies, including some of Derby's well-established resident Italians, all of whom visit her stall at the historic Victorian Market Hall on a regular basis. "We're really popular," she says, "so we must be doing something right."



BEST SUPERMARKET MARGHERITA PIZZA

MARKS & SPENCER WOODFIRED MARGHERITA PIZZA

From Marks & Spencer Food Halls
www.marksandspencer.com

Price £4.00

No, we don't always cook five-course meals from scratch. Sometimes we get a pizza in... We shop around though, to see what's best. And, currently, we think this one is.

If you could make a pizza at home as good as this then you'd be doing well... This is as authentic as it comes, utilising a slow-proven dough that's been cooked in a wood-fired oven, and topped with genuine quality mozzarella cheese from Campania, a delicious tomato and basil sauce, and garnished with sun-dried baby tomatoes from Sicily. Yes, it combines to form a bit of a mish-mash of Italian regions, but the result is quite simply superb. Once cooked, the base is light and crisp, the sauce is powerful though not overwhelming, and the cheese – well – this is the best we've ever tasted on a supermarket pizza. We're not big fans of sun-dried cherry tomatoes in the *Italia!* office (we prefer the more traditional plum), but the ones that top this pizza are sweet and succulent. Top notch.



BEST DESSERT WINE TORCOLATO 2011, MACULAN

From **Berkmann**
www.berkmann.co.uk
Price £22.50 for 35cl

As we were making the December issue of the magazine we were, of course, looking forward to Christmas and those special treats we really only enjoy at that time of year. Time to taste some dessert wines then... Now this is something the Italians do truly excel at, whether it be sweet white wines like this one, or even sweet reds, using the *recioto* method. There are even sparkling sweet wines, and not just for their novelty value either. Any dessert wine tends to be a little stronger than your regular wine, and it was Christmas (almost), so please forgive us for not retaining all our tasting notes on these...

Vespaiaola isn't a grape variety that many would have heard of, and yet it thrives in the Veneto as long as it's treated with respect and isn't expected to produce large yields. The Torcolato from Maculan is made with 100 per cent Vespaiaola, and it's an absolute gem of a wine. It has an intense aroma of honey and orange blossom, and an abundance of tropical fruit in the mouth. But it's this wine's balance between sweet and dry that makes it. It's a rare dessert wine where you could drink the bottle.

DISCOVERY OF THE
MONTH
DEC
2015



BEST ONLINE DELI FRATELLI CAMISA

Fratelli Camisa opened their first delicatessen in Berwick Street, Soho, in 1929. They were among the first people to import fresh Italian products to the UK. Originally they catered to the local Italian community but as demand for traditional authentic food grew, so did the business.

Fratelli Camisa continues to be a family-run concern that has grown from the first shop into a nationwide distribution network. Now based in offices and a modern warehouse in Waltham Abbey, the company maintains the tradition of delivering a full range of deli products, *salame*, cheeses, fresh pasta and ambient goods. Fratelli Camisa use local contacts and knowledge, built up through generations, to source wonderful artisan foods that you won't find anywhere else. Over 90 per cent of lines are imported exclusively by Fratelli Camisa from small, family-run businesses in the Italian countryside. Each item on the Fratelli Camisa site is individually sourced and quality checked. Fratelli Camisa's customer commitment is to provide a first-class service, from the moment your order is received to when it is delivered to your door. Fratelli Camisa staff have an in-depth knowledge of the specialist food market and pride themselves on providing a service that delivers high-quality gourmet foods direct from the producer to you at realistic and competitive prices.



BEST SWEET TREATS GIANDUIOTTI MILK & HAZELNUT CHOCOLATES

From **Carluccio's stores**
Price £5.95 for a small bag, or £10.95 for a larger box

We round off as we should with some chocolate. It may be that you are denying yourself at this time of the year – and we would commend you for efforts, but surely that doesn't mean you can't buy a little bag of these from Carluccio's and keep them safely, out of temptation's way, in the back of the cupboard. Come on! What's the worst that can happen?

The very finest quality chocolate is combined with Piedmont's famous hazelnuts – ground to a paste – and piped out through a triangular nozzle to form what are known as Gianduiotti. Dating back to Turin during the 19th century, these are deliciously rich and smooth with an almost creamy texture. The combination of nut paste and chocolate is quite intoxicating, in this instance with a very fine balance of flavours – neither too 'chocolatey' nor too 'nutty'. They're absolutely perfect with a strong after-dinner espresso, though can equally be enjoyed on their own. If you're feeling indulgent, then sample with a chilled glass of Vin Santo. No, they're not cheap, but this is Italian chocolate at its best. ■

EDITOR'S CHOICE
ITALIA!
APRIL
2015





€100,000-€200,000

ARGENTIERA, SARDINIA

Live In Sardinia is delighted to present 23 detached bungalows plunged into a picturesque 18ha park covered by scented Mediterranean vegetation, overlooking crystal clear waters along the fascinating Argentario, 30km north Alghero. The villas are accessed through walkways and consist of a living room with kitchenette, a bedroom, bathroom with balcony, a wooden loft of 15sqm, a utility room and a 28sqm veranda, surrounded by a 300sqm garden.

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€100,000-€200,000

CAPORCIANO, ABRUZZO

This image shows the master bedroom of this gorgeous village property, with its exposed stone walls, oak floors, chestnut beams, large, sunny terrace with breathtaking views of the high Apennines, and unique bathroom. Set over 3 floors, this well restored, characterful property has 3 bedrooms, 2 bathrooms, 2 large stone fireplaces, vaulted ceilings, a superb kitchen space that ends in a cave and a spectacular cellar. Easy access from Rome and Pescara, nestled in the heart of Abruzzo and close to all four of the region's national parks.

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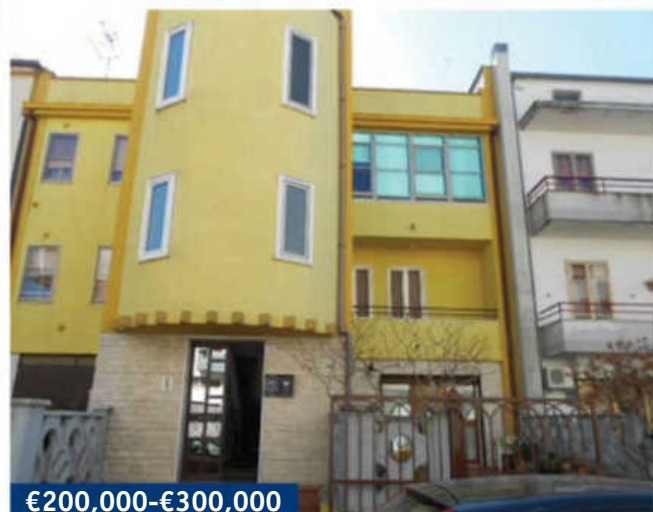
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€200,000-€300,000

CAROVIGNO, PUGLIA

3 bedroom property with swimming pool close to resort of Specchiolla on the Adriatic coast of Puglia, some 5km from Carovigno, with lovely views over the sea 2km away, and yet only about 30 minutes from Brindisi airport. The property consists of a main villa which provides about 80sqm of accommodation consisting of a living room with corner fireplace, kitchen, 3 bedrooms, 2 bathrooms, covered terraces and roof terrace with views over the countryside and down to the sea. The property also benefits from its own *trullo*. The villa sits in about 3,000sqm of land with a swimming pool, sun terrace and ample parking. A delightful villa, close to the sea as well as all amenities, and ideal for both personal use or as rental potential. Ref 3631
Price €250,000 Contact ☎ 01322 660 988 www.casatravella.com



€200,000-€300,000

POMARICO, BASILICATA

Spacious 4 bedroom apartment in the town of Pomarico, some 20 minutes from the Ionian sea at Metaponto, and the city of Matera, which has just been made European City of Culture, whilst only 90 minutes from the airport of Bari. The apartment provides a spacious 120sqm of accommodation consisting of the following: Ground floor: Small taverna with fireplace. First floor: Large living room, kitchen, 3 bedrooms, and 2 bathrooms. Second floor: A further 70sqm in the loft area with lounge, bedroom and bathroom. The apartment also benefits from a garden, private parking space, and is close to all amenities and within easy reach of the beaches at Metaponto, the city of Matera and the UNESCO Heritage site of the Sassi. Ref 3856
Price €200,000 Contact ☎ 01322 660 988 www.casatravella.com



€300,000-€400,000

MATERA, BASILICATA

2 bedroom apartment in the centre of Matera, just 500 metres from the Sassi, a UNESCO Heritage site, whilst only some 30 minutes from the beautiful beaches of the Ionian sea and less than 1 hour from Bari airport. The property provides 85sqm of accommodation on the third floor, plus a further 20sqm of balconies, and includes a living room, fully fitted kitchen, master bedroom with built-in wardrobes, second bedroom, 2 bathrooms, storage room, balconies and a private garage. The property benefits from air conditioning, underfloor central heating, alarm system, parquet flooring and is being sold with fitted kitchen, built-in wardrobes and mosquito blinds and sun blinds. Ref 3857
Price €310,000 Contact ☎ 01322 660 988 www.casatravella.com



€200,000-€300,000

CAROVIGNO, PUGLIA

Renovated 3 bedroom villa on a hill overlooking the fishing village and beaches of Torre Santa Sabina, 3km from Carovigno, 20 minutes from Brindisi airport and 100km from Bari airport and city. The property provides about 110sqm of accommodation including a large open plan living room with exit to covered patio of about 200sqm with steps which lead to the beautiful veranda, fully fitted oak Shaker-style kitchen with all appliances and exit onto side patio of some 50sqm, master bedroom with sea views and large en-suite bathroom, 2nd bedroom, 2nd bathroom and storage room on the ground floor. Spiral stairs lead to the lower ground floor which contains the 3rd bedroom with en-suite shower room and garage. Ref 3606. *Price reduced to €230,000 Contact ☎ 01322 660 988 www.casatravella.com*

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NEW FLORENCE

With the expanded Museo dell'Opera del Duomo now open, the newly pristine Baptistry unveiled, and the bounteous Mercato Centrale open every day, **Chris Allsop** discovered that off-season Florence has become all the more attractive...



Photograph © Antonio Quatrone



*La Sala della Maddalena di Donatello,
Museo dell'Opera del Duomo, Firenze*

Twenty tourists for every local. That was the rough estimate I received last May from Francesca, my guide, for the numbers you'd expect to encounter on an average day in Florence's historic centre during high season. This city gets crowded.

This is Florence, after all – a museum director's fever dream of astounding Renaissance art and architecture, and one of the world's easiest cities on the eye. That can be hard to appreciate, however, if you're of

average height and mired in a lumbering herd of art-dazed sightseers.

Fortunately, I was able to visit the Tuscan capital again last November (Francesca recommended October for the best chance of good weather and fewer tourists). There were still a few tour groups, but I could stroll freely through the streets. The weather was a mix, as you'd expect: mostly sunny, occasionally overcast, off and on showers – cool but not cold, with distant snowy peaks drawing my attention to the Apennines for the first time.



This isn't a winter sun trip by any means, but for those wanting the space to enjoy Florence for its world class culture and cuisine, off- and shoulder-seasons trips (with reduced hotel prices to boot) are strongly recommended. And if the weather is less than magnificent, well, who cares – indoors in Florence is not like indoors just anywhere.

THE DUOMO MUSEUM

And I'm not just referring to the Uffizi Gallery – although that magnificent museum could

probably keep you entertained for your entire trip. Last November, the €45 million two-year refurbishment of the Museo dell'Opera del Duomo (aka the Duomo Museum to English speakers) was finally completed. Inside this strikingly modern museum, you'll explore the world's largest collection of Florentine sculptures from the Medieval and Renaissance periods spread over 25 exhibition halls.



Detail of the Baptistery ceiling



Fresh pasta at the Mercato



More treats at the Mercato



The doors of the Baptistery



The Silver Altar in the Baptistery

WHERE TO EAT

THE FUSION BAR & RESTAURANT

Vicolo dell'Oro, 3

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www.lungarnocollection.com

The fusion referred to in the name is Mediterranean and Oriental cuisines: the menu of this hip restaurant offers good sushi, better tapas, but it's Karim's cocktails and the buzzy ambiance that you'll remember best.

€ €

BORGIO SAN JACOPO RESTAURANT

Borgio San Jacopo, 62/r

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Chef Peter Brunel was the youngest chef ever to be awarded a Michelin Star at his previous gig in Lake Garda and now the San Jacopo has one too. Shatter your low-carb diet with the five-course potato-based tasting menu that includes: potato spaghetti with pork cheek, potato sorbet with caviar, and a fingerling potato presented as a fossil...

€ € €

Sounds overwhelming? Actually, thanks to the layout's careful planning, it's quite the opposite. The elegant design layers over itself, offering new perspectives on halls you've previously walked through, and varied lighting throughout the galleries is just one of the tricks employed to engage visitors. The original museum was founded in 1891, but its lack of exhibition space meant that its concept was always unfulfilled.

"Worse yet," explained Timothy Verdon, the museum's American director, who was kind enough to give me a short guided tour, "the old rooms were too small for the works shown, many of which are larger than life and meant to be seen from a distance."

This includes the centrepiece – the original medieval façade of the Duomo. Dismantled into 100 fragments in the late 16th century, the façade is one of the great works of art that never was, comprising 40 statues, intricate mosaic inlay, and a galaxy of other sculpted elements.

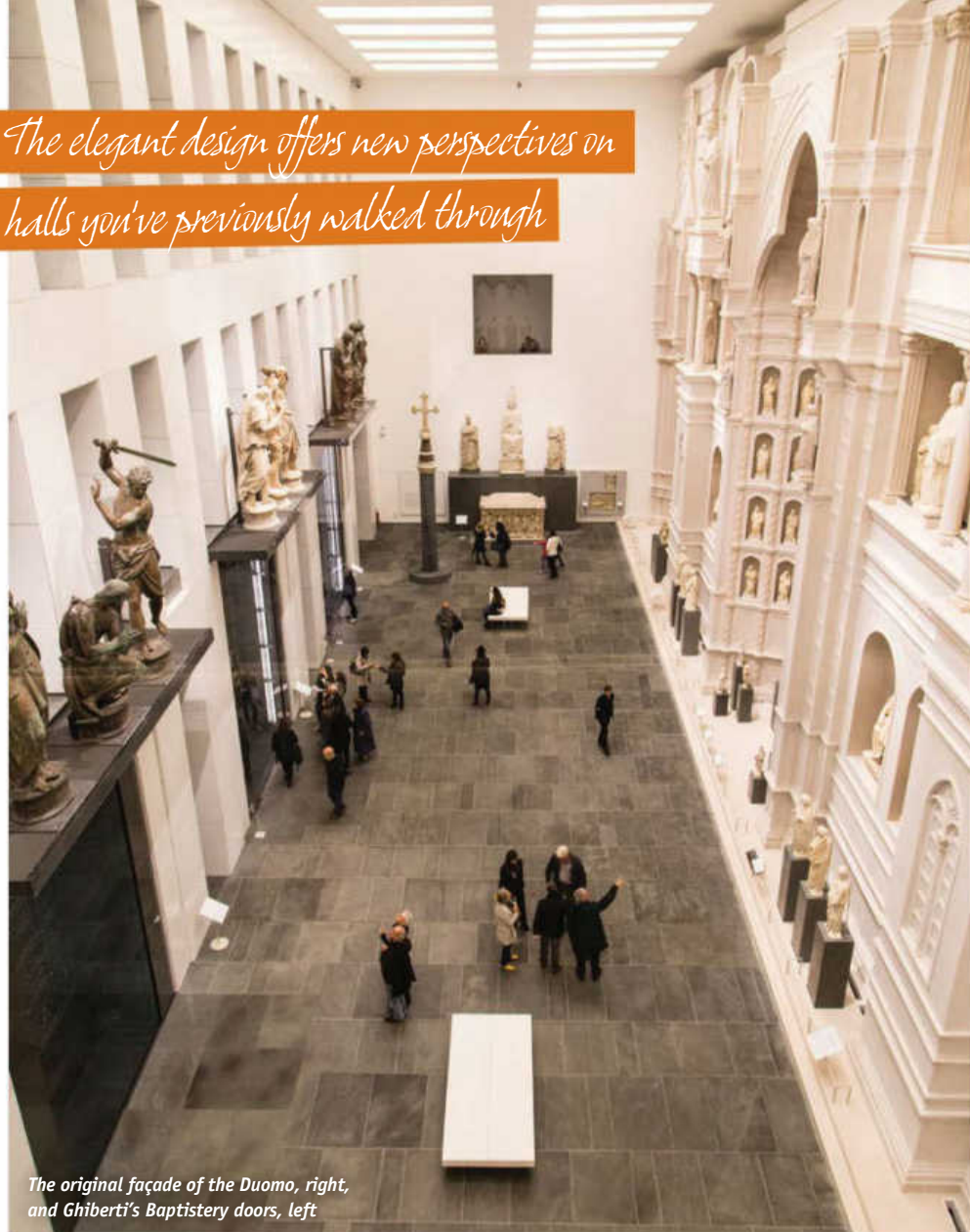
Over the years the exhibition space increased from two rooms to 18, but it wasn't

until 1997, when an 18th century theatre adjacent to the museum was acquired, that the dimensions required to exhibit the façade in full (the project was abandoned after reaching only a third of its height) was secured. You can now view "the largest work of art in Florence" where it's been reconstructed in a bright, airy space reminiscent of the Tate's Turbine Hall.

You'd think the façade would be the main draw, but the museum is so full of marvels that it all depends on what you like, really. Fancy a bit of Michelangelo? Check out the room dedicated to the sculptor's *Florentine Pietà* – this work, intended for the great artist's own tomb, portrays Michelangelo, in disguised self-portrait, as Nicodemus lowering Christ's body down from the cross. Crazy for relics? The contrastingly intimate 'reliquary chapel' is a circular display of holy masterpieces. Mad for Renaissance bling? The renovated Silver Altar from the Baptistery of St John, which took 104 years of work by some of Florence's greatest Renaissance masters to complete, awaits you.

The elegant design offers new perspectives on halls you've previously walked through

Photography © Chris Allsop unless otherwise stated



The original façade of the Duomo, right, and Ghiberti's Baptistery doors, left

Auspiciously, the baptistery also recently reopened last winter after its first top-to-bottom clean in about 70 years. The €15 ticket for entry to the Duomo Museum also grants access to the Baptistery – as well as Giotto's Bell Tower, Brunelleschi's Dome, and the Crypt of Santa Reparata – so it's nice to be able to wander into the usually serene Baptistery and imagine what the Silver Altar would have looked like beneath that mesmerising gold ceiling.

THE CENTRAL MARKET

Another relatively recent opening in the city is the *Mercato Centrale* – a former fish and meat market that has been transformed, after a renovation in 2014, into a laid-back gastro-barn. Squeeze through the stalls and leather smells of the outdoor San Lorenzo leather market to find the entrance escalator that whisks you up to the first floor of the Mercato, where the smell of leather is replaced by a cocktail of aromas of freshly baked bread, margherita pizzas crisping in wood-

fired ovens, and other curious food whiffs compelling you to delve deeper into the brightly designed kiosks.

The Mercato's original, French-influenced structure dates to 1874, when it was constructed as a monument to a new era for the city – the time when Florence was briefly the capital of the newly reunited Italy. Today its revitalisation has had a ripple effect on the surrounding neighbourhood, and Florentines have learned that it's one of the best places in town to hang out. (It is open from 10am to midnight daily.)

The conceptual masterminds behind the Mercato created it not just to show off the best Tuscany has to offer, but the country as a whole. So inside you'll find buffalo mozzarella brought up fresh from a farm on the outskirts of Naples, World Pastry Champion Cristian Beduschi's award-winning seven-layer ice cream cake, and lashings of *lampredotto* – Florentine tripe made from the fourth stomach of the cow, that's a popular sandwich option in the city. Sad to say, my unadventurous ➤



This column: The Portrait Firenze Hotel (see below)



Photography above © Portrait Firenze

WHERE TO STAY

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Owned by the Ferragamo family, the 5-star Portrait Firenze is your insurance policy against poor weather on your off-season sojourn (views of the Ponte Vecchio allow you to armchair-sightsee one of the most beautiful scenes of the city from the comfort of your own room). The interior décor takes its cue from the birth of Italian couture in the 1950s and offers a crisp, stylish feel to its plush suites. The cool retro ambiance extends to the reception and in-house Caffè dell'Oro (which offers the most extensive selection of honey this breakfasting journalist has ever enjoyed). At €450 per night (price is based on two adults sharing, excluding breakfast, VAT and city tax) it isn't budget, but what else would you expect from a hotel that emails you in advance to find out your preferred pillow filling?

*These indoor spaces are capable
of turning an inclement weather
day into a happy opportunity*



Celebrity footwear in the Ferragamo Museum



GETTING THERE

► BY PLANE

Direct flights to Pisa G. Galilei airport (PSA) are available from numerous airports in the UK including London Gatwick, Bristol, and Liverpool. From Pisa Centrale train station, a train to Florence (taking up to an hour and a half) costs €8 (second class only). There's also a shuttle bus that departs from the airport to Florence every 20 minutes (€7.50 one way) and takes just over an hour (traffic permitting).

► KEY TO RESTAURANT PRICES (full meal per person, not including wine)

€ Up to €25
€ € €26-€50
€ € € More than €50

group plumped for the pizza instead, served up at a kiosk that's been awarded the national equivalent of a Michelin star.

Best of all, the exquisite margherita that I wolfed was prepared with the creamy buffalo mozzarella from the cheese stall. There's a kind of commercial symbiosis operated at the Mercato in an effort to create the right atmosphere; there's no rental fee for stall owners (although 30 per cent of their takings do go to the city) and they're encouraged to buy each other's produce and advertise the fact. The artisan food makers and sellers are chosen for their produce first and style second. Beneath all of this collaborative loveliness, there's a ruthless streak: if you're not hitting the right note, you will be let go. I heard some mutterings about unsmiling past tenants who hadn't had the correct 'market attitude'.

Beyond the high-level grazing, there's also olive oil and wine tastings available, as well as superb cooking lessons (investigate the latter at www.cucinaldm.com) all on-site.

THE FERRAGAMO MUSEUM

If digestion is slowing your mental faculties post-Mercato, saunter through the *Museo Ferragamo* for a refreshing slice of Italian style and culture that's a little less taxing. Located within the austere stone block that is also the headquarters for the Ferragamo fashion empire, the Ferragamo museum may be named after the legendary shoemaker, but actually offers a more diverse experience than you might expect.

It's more of a museum of Salvatore Ferragamo crossed with an exhibition about the history of the building itself – Palazzo Spini Feroni – originally built in 1289 by a powerful family of medieval bankers. The museum's charming eclecticism never baffles, and you can admire wooden models of Ingrid Bergman's flat feet in one room, a first edition of *Tuscan Fairy Tales* in the next, and a boutique gallery of Futurist paintings round the corner, all in about a half-hour visit (entry: €6). These are indoor spaces that are richly Italian, and capable of turning an inclement weather day into a happy opportunity. ■



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Villa Très Jolie is surrounded by magnificent mountains which are superb for walking and mountain biking

Set in the Alto Lario area at the top of Lake Como, the villa is surrounded by magnificent mountains which are superb for walking and mountain biking – and Dani and Giulio have over 15 years' experience of organising special walking weeks where they show off their



lake and the surrounding areas on foot. On the days out they give local tips and information and at lunchtime there are meals in traditional *trattorie* trying out local specialities.

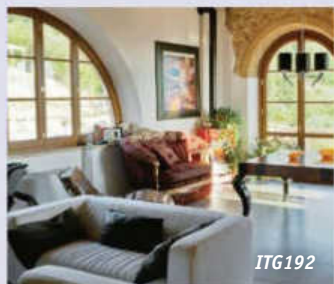
If you prefer to take it easy there are many other things to do – the boats around the lake, gorgeous villages to investigate and, of course, the local markets. In autumn there are the wine festivals and local fairs. Dani is an ex-tour guide and has plenty of advice about what to do. Special diets are also catered for – vegetarian, gluten/dairy-free. We are very pet-friendly too.



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The Venice Regatta





Photography © Sara Scarpa

Rowing competitions galore and a spectacular parade. **Sara Scarpa** witnesses the *Regata Storica* – an annual return to the glorious past of *La Serenissima*...



Images, clockwise from top left: You will get a great view of the Regatta from the machina at Ca' Foscari Palace; people enjoying the Regatta from the balcony of a palazzo on the Canal Grande; parade boat flying the flag of the Serenissima; i regattanti – regatta competitors; the Doge and his wife are represented by actors in period costume

Every year thousands of Venetians wait impatiently for the first Sunday of September to attend the main annual rowing competition so they can be a part of this spectacular tradition that has been taking place for centuries.

La Regata Storica, Historical Regatta, is preceded by a colourful historical parade of 16th-century-style boats with rowers and passengers dressed in period costumes. The event commemorates the arrival of Caterina Cornaro, the Queen of Cyprus, in Venice in 1489. The honours offered to her by the *Serenissima* as a welcome for giving up her crown in favour of Venice are re-enacted, which recreates the grandeur of the *Serenissima*.

The richly decorated Bucintoro – the state barge of the doges of Venice, which carries people dressed up as the Doge (the leader of the Republic) and his wife, along with the local dignitaries – heads the flotilla along the most beautiful “street” in the world, the Grand Canal. One could not possibly imagine a better background for this celebration, a canal flanked by hundreds of stunning ancient palaces, the images of which are reflected into its bottle-green water.

There is a magical atmosphere with everyone playing their part – if you look around you will see people crowding the *altane* (small roof terraces), leaning out of the elegant balconies of the *palazzi*, sitting along the embankment or on boats. You will not see the same calm formality that you come across at Henley (no suits, below-the-knee dresses or hats) but you will witness the passion of the locals loudly cheering their teams – plus sometimes even some rivalry and some physical altercation between the gondoliers! In the past, in order to maintain order, the competition was preceded by a fleet of *bissone* (traditional parade boats) with noblemen armed with bows who would throw terracotta shots at the unruly spectators – but don't worry, that won't happen today!

After the historical procession the actual rowing competitions start, with the oarsmen rowing standing



up, according to the Venetian way of rowing – *la Voga alla Veneta*. The boat competitions are divided into categories according to the age of the rowers and the types of boats used – first the young rowers on *pupparini*, then the women on *mascarete*, then the *caorline* and, finally, the most loved: the *gondolini* (two-oared, 10-metre-long, very thin gondolas rowed by the champions). It is a real competition between the different Venetian districts, the competing boats speed along the Grand Canal identified by their numbers and colours – white for Burano, purple for Saccafisola, light blue for Lido, red for Giudecca, green for Mestre, Orange for Cavallino-Tre Porti, brown for Malcontenta, pink for Jesolo and yellow for Castello.

The *gondolini* start from Riva degli Schiavoni, rowing all the way to the Ponte della Costituzione at Santa Lucia Railway, where they turn around a pylon. The boats then head back to the finishing point at the *machina* – a VIP floating platform located in front of Ca' Foscari Palace.

This year I was lucky enough to be invited to enjoy the regatta from this exclusive location with the local authorities. I was thrilled! It is a great setting *alla volta del Canal* (where the Canal turns)

INFORMATION

► During the *Regata Storica*, the public boat services are altered or suspended from around 2pm until about 7.30pm in order to allow the parade and the rowing competitions to take place. In the afternoon there are no public boats along the Grand Canal. For more details check www.actv.it

LA VOGA ALLA VENETA

The *Voga alla Veneta*, the 'Venetian style of rowing', is a way of rowing standing up. It is typical of Venice as its beginnings are linked to the city's shallow sea bottom and it won't be seen anywhere else in the world. Originally on flat-bottomed boats, one had to row standing up so as to be able to see if the water was deep enough. A *forcola* (gondola rowlock) would be used in case the oar got stuck.





Images, main feature, clockwise from top left: Ceremonial boat with the winged lion of St Mark; The Lido bissonne, or parade boat; the parade boat of Riviera del Brenta, with its rowers doing the alza remi, paying homage to the authorities in front of the machina; the mayor of Venice, Luigi Brugnaro, with the swimmers holding the flag of the Serenissima; rowers of a caorlina boat – with my cousin up front! Inset, above right: My father (left), with Tersillo Fongher, one of the head coaches of the Regatta

next to Palazzo Balbi, with a stunning view over Rialto Bridge. Everybody there, including myself, really made an effort to dress up for the *bella figura*! I must confess I loved looking at the smart outfits of the spectators while I was waiting for the boats to pass by. However, I did miss the relaxed enthusiasm of the people loudly cheering for their teams from the *rive* (embankment) and I tried my best to compensate this lack of enthusiasm by determinedly clapping my hands as hard as I could!

The *machina* is the stage where cash and pennants are donated to the winners – red for first place, white for second, green for third and blue for fourth. Plus, if the *gondolini*'s rowers win for five consecutive years, they are designated *Re del Remo* (King of the Oar).

There is a *Regata* champion from my family – a Scarpa nicknamed “Panetti” (little bread). In the ‘20s he and his cousin, Luigi Scarpa, dominated the world of rowing. Together they won four times. Sons of fishermen and hunters, they were from the island of Giudecca. They were dubbed “*gli studenti*” (the students) for their way of dressing.

A LIVE PIGLET

For more than hundred years, up until 2002, one of the prizes for the rowers of the *gondolini* who got fourth place was a live piglet! The animal was put in a crate and was passed among the boats, but this



tradition has been banned by the animal rights organisations and the live piglet has been substituted with a Murano glass pig. It did not take the Venetians long, however, to find an alternative worthwhile prize, and soon they introduced a rich dinner to celebrate the victory. And guess what is usually on the menu...? Please do not tell the vegetarians!

The allocation of the prizes at the *machina* takes place after the inevitable mutual accusations of unfairness between teams has been sorted out! This year, the long-term rivalry between the D'Este and the Vignotto (rivals in the regatta for the past 15 years!) was re-ignited. The Vignotto cousins won after the opponent oarsmen, D'Este and Tezzat, had been expelled for taking a narrow lead to win. The frustrated D'Este was so upset that he has threatened to leave rowing forever and to start horse riding! I am really looking forward to seeing what is going to happen this year! ■

THE BEST PLACES TO SEE THE ‘REGATA STORICA’

- On the *rive* (embankment) of the Grand Canal. It is free but you have to get there very early if you want a good position as it gets very busy.
- On a boat from the embankment of the Grand Canal, either by hiring one or joining an organised tour.
- On the *altane* (roof terraces) or terraces of a palace on the Grand Canal (privately owned).
- On the floating platform of San Vio, which is set in one of the best points along the route and allows you to attend the historical parade and all the regattas (tickets only).
- On the *machina*, the spectacular floating stage located in front of Ca' Foscari palace (invitation only).



THE *ITALIA!* 2015 READERS' PHOTO COMPETITION!

Which one will you vote for? *Italia!* invites its readership to vote for the very best **Reader's Photograph of 2015...**

One of our most popular sections, the Readers' Photo Competition draws in dozens of entries every month, many of them absolutely superb. The *Italia!* team selects the best for publication each issue, and then we carefully narrow that selection down to the very best – the winner of a magnum of Nino Franco Rustico Prosecco and a wine chiller to keep it in.

But which is the best of the best from our 2015 collection? That's for you, the readers of *Italia!* magazine to decide. We've published all 12 of last year's winning photographs online and now we invite you to vote for your favourite. The ultimate winner will receive two nights in the stunning Villa Barberina in the Veneto, owned by Nino Franco.

To participate, simply go to www.italytravelandlife.com/readersphoto2015competition

to view the photographs and then follow the link to vote. All votes should be cast by Friday 25 March and we'll announce the winner in the May 2016 edition of the magazine.

And to those of you've been entered for the prize, the *Italia!* team wishes you the very best of luck. The winner will be contacted directly by editor Paul Pettengale after voting has closed.

ABOUT THE VILLA

In the quiet and historic town of Valdobbiadene, right in the heart of the Prosecco hills, this beautiful villa is a wonderful evidence of the glorious past of Treviso. Built by the wealthy family Sarri-Dall'Armi, it was bought by Celestino Piva – silk industrialist and philanthropist of the local community – in the late 19th century. The house was owned and inhabited by his successors until a few years ago when it was bought by Nino Franco Spumanti

winery. Mr Franco's artistic sensibility led to the accurate restoration of this villa and transformed it into a refined and charming relais. Here the past blends wonderfully with the present, while respecting the original architecture and the precious interiors – thanks to which Villa Barberina has recently been defined a "museum house". The atmosphere of bygone days that pervades this place can be felt as soon as you walk through the large iron gates. From here a long avenue leads to the residence and runs through a magnificent park with luxuriant trees, picturesque statues and fountains. Villa Barberina is made up of a central body and two side wings ending with graceful dovecote towers. Behind the house stands the wide porticoed barn providing access to the vineyards. The real surprise is, however, the interior, which still preserves the furniture, the curtains, the frescoes and even the antique furnishings. The five bedrooms have been converted into charming suites with

luxury bathrooms and all modern comforts, and old library, the living and rooms, and dining rooms furnished with taste and refinement.

Something not to be missed is a dip in the amazing two-two-level swimming pool, surrounded by greenery, built in stone and open from April to November.

Villa Barberina is also ideal for small and exclusive business meetings and unforgettable social receptions.



The villa's two-level pool

The ultimate winner will receive two nights in the stunning Villa Barberina in the Veneto, owned by Nino Franco

The Villa Barberina



Would you like to stay at the villa? Visit www.villabarberina.it

INFORMATION

► Terms and conditions apply. For full details regarding the terms applying to the prize, selected entrants should please contact paul.pettengale@anthem-publishing.com



View of the Villa and the Grave di Stecca vineyard

NINO FRANCO – VALDOBBIADENE PROSECCO SUPERIORE DOCG

ABOUT NINO FRANCO

Antonio Franco founded the Cantine Franco winery in Valdobbiadene back in 1919.

Valdobbiadene is located at the foot of the Pre-Alps, in the Veneto region, and is famous for its Prosecco wine and wine production.

This winery is proud to be one of the oldest in Valdobbiadene, located in the town centre, not far away from the countryside and the vineyards.

Thanks to a careful and wise management, the estate has been growing and evolving through three generations of producers. Antonio founded it, Nino expanded it and Primo improved the company performance through the years. 1982, when Primo took over its management, was the turning point.

Primo began to travel and to successfully export the wines in Europe as well as in the Americas

and the Far East. At the same time he invested in the production process in order to make higher quality wines, eliminating all those wines that were atypical for the area. He also started to monitor closely the grape cultivation with the aim of achieving high quality from the raw material level to the final product.

Primo Franco was one of the first pioneers to export Prosecco and to introduce a different sparkling wine than Champagne into the international market. He has been successful thanks to his open mind, personality, his spontaneity, reliability and competence, as well as his charm and ability to communicate his love for his job, and last but not least thanks to his high quality and delicious wines.

To learn more about Nino Franco and its range of prosecco wines, visit www.ninofranco.it



*Nino Franco
Prosecco
Superiore DOCG
is available in
the UK via www.sommelierschoice.co.uk*



THIS MONTH'S EXPERTS



ROBERT HOFSTEED is a registered and licensed real estate agent in Le Marche, and Managing Director of Marche Property Net. His partner, Monique de Veer, has been running the holiday rental

agency Le Marche Explorer for over 15 years.
www.marchepropertynet.com
www.le-marche-explorer.com



PAUL PETTENGAL launched *Italia!* in 2004 and returned to the editor's chair ten years later. An expert on Italian wine and food he has travelled extensively to the many renowned wine

producing zones across the peninsula. He continues to write the *Drink Italia!* section of the magazine (see page 93).



LAURA PROTTI is dual qualified as an Italian *avvocato* and English solicitor. She has extensive experience in Italian property law, international private law, contract law, succession law, and

taxation, and has assisted with the drafting and updating of books and articles on Italian Law. www.leplaw.co.uk

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

Our experts are here to help with all your questions about Italy. Email your questions to italia@anthem-publishing.com, or write to us at our usual address, as given on page 18.



The up-and-coming Province of Macerata

LE MARCHE HOT SPOTS

Q *I am searching for properties in Le Marche, though note that prices seem to be rising. What has the market been like of late, and what are the prospects for the future? Are there any particular property hot spots in the area? I'm not necessarily looking for a long-term investment, and would prefer to buy somewhere that's not too far from the sea.*

David Crest, via email

A It might be that some property owners are increasing their asking prices but this is certainly not a general trend – yet! Our company, Marche Property Net, occasionally gets requests from property owners to increase their price. However, this is usually an adjustment to compensate for the falling Euro as they are quoting their

prices in US\$ or Sterling. However, I always inform them that although the market seems to be improving it is still a buyers' market. We find that attractive properties with a good value-for-money ratio are attracting more interest and have therefore more potential to be sold.

The statistics provided by the Italian Tax Department show that asking prices for property in Le Marche are not going up. However, the figures cover all properties and not just holiday homes and apartments.

You may get the impression of higher prices if you are looking for properties close to the sea. Traditionally properties near the sea tend to be more expensive, not only because of the location, but also because Italians too are interested – increased demand means higher prices. Furthermore, there

THE COST OF OLIVE OIL

Q Why is there such a huge variation in the cost of olive oils? I usually buy a supermarket branded oil for around £4 (for 500ml), but in the same supermarket I've seen oils that cost as much as £20 for a relatively small bottle. How can this be? Surely olives are just olives, and when pressed just produce, well, oil? Also, should I cook with extra-virgin olive oil? My partner insisted I shouldn't.

Janet Hunt, via email

A Olives are 'just' olives in the same way that grapes are 'just' grapes. Carefully grown and maintained olive trees on prime estates produce berries that produce very fine quality oils with really distinct flavours and these can command very high prices indeed. The mass-produced stuff you'll find in supermarket-branded bottles will inevitably be inferior, and therefore much, much cheaper. Olive oils are prized like fine wines in Italy. The best oils are cold-pressed, so look for that on the label if you're intending to buy a decent oil for dressings and dips. Expensive oils should never be used for cooking! You'll be wasting your money in doing so as the heating process diminishes the flavour dramatically. Extra-virgin olive oils can be used in cooking, though in 'gentle' dishes where there's not a great deal of heat applied. They burn at a far lower temperature than other vegetable oils.

Paul Pettengale, Editor of Italia!



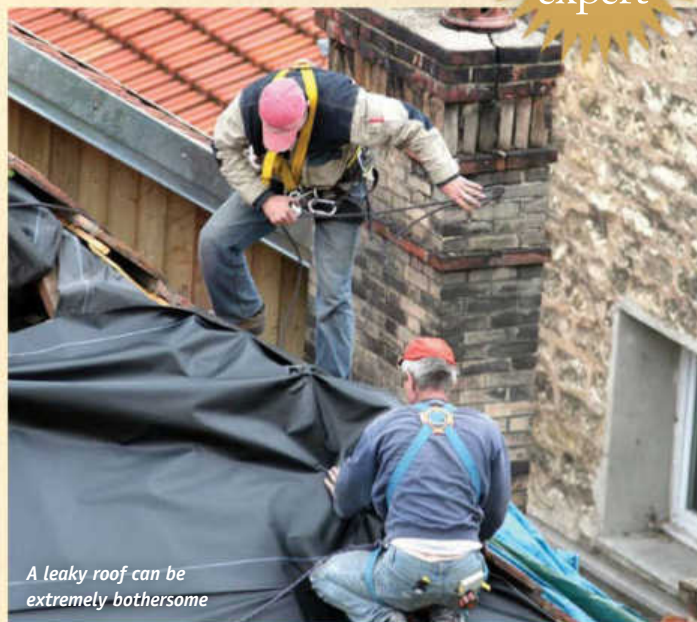
How much should you spend on olive oil?

are not as many properties near the sea that match the requirements for your dream house: tranquillity, unspoiled (sea) views and a property with 'character'. Along the Adriatic coast you will notice that the location of the *autostrada*, the railway line and the many coastal towns limits the number of interesting properties; and a limited supply again leads to an increase in prices.

The best value can be found if you look inland say between 10 and 40km from the coast. As long as the property is near the *superstrada* then access to the coast and the mountains is very convenient. As well as better value for money, properties in this region can offer coastal views, mountain views – or both!

I personally have a preference for Macerata Province which in itself qualifies as a 'sweet spot'. Why? Because there are numerous lovely villages, parks and restaurants, access to the *superstrada* and the right mix of what makes Le Marche so famous: 'Monte e Mare'.

Robert Hoffsteede, Marche Property Net



LEGAL REDRESS FOR CASH-IN-HAND WORK

Q I have just returned from my recently purchased house in Umbria to discover that the builder commissioned to replace the roof has done a shockingly bad job. It leaks! And it cost me thousands of Euros. Where do I stand in terms of suing? And what is the legal process? He insisted on being paid up front in cash.

Brian Leech, via email

A Property owners who wish to build or restore their property located in Italy by instructing a construction company should always agree the terms of the work in writing beforehand.

A work contract should specify the details and specification of the works to be carried out, the timescale for the works and whether the builder intends to sub-contract the works to a different company. A penalty should be agreed if the set timescale is not met, unless the delay is due to unforeseeable events or force majeure.

Furthermore, in most cases restoration works require builders to meet strict requirements related to health and safety at the building site and the employment of personnel. The payments should be made in instalments to reflect the work stages and only subject to a satisfactory inspection of the works. It is therefore very important to specify in the contract that the builder meets the legal requirements in this respect and make sure that proper insurance is in place for the construction works.

Where there is no formal written contract it is very difficult to enforce a verbal and informal agreement with the builder unless written and clear evidence (such as written correspondence, pictures, plans, etc.) is produced to show the specifications and the terms agreed. In this case, it is advisable to seek independent legal advice to investigate the possibility of suing the builder for damages caused to the property. An assessment of the builder's financial status may be appropriate before embarking on expensive legal proceedings to claim compensation.

Laura Protti, LEP Law

Laura Protti is the founder of LEP Law. She is dual-qualified as an Italian *avvocato* and English solicitor, and specialises in assisting British and Italian clients with matters relating to Italian law. Visit her website at www.leplaw.co.uk for more.



THE DIOSCURI

The statues of **Castor and Pollux** on the Capitoline Hill are ancient and were only brought here in 1583. But the myth that inspired them is much older still...



The Dioscuri – the name means ‘Sons of Zeus’ – were the twins Castor and Polydeuces, aka Pollux. Zeus, you see, was a sly old fox, and he appeared to Leda, the boys’ mother, in the guise of a swan, which enabled him to seduce (ie, rape) her, after which she gave birth to the twin boys.

Now, actually, whether both boys were fathered by Zeus, or whether only Pollux was, while Castor was the son of Leda’s mortal husband, Tyndareus, who she slept with on the same night, or even whether neither was, depends on whose version of the story you follow (they did not have DNA tests in those days, and in any case it is unlikely that a god as important as Zeus would have consented to one) though what is generally

agreed is that they were at least half-brothers to the incomparably beautiful Helen of Troy.

Pollux was a great boxer and Castor was a great horseman and the two got into various boyish scrapes – including rescuing their sister Helen after she had been abducted by Theseus, and sailing with Jason and the Argonauts in the quest for the Golden Fleece. They are associated with the stars at the head of the constellation of Gemini (‘The Twins’, of course) and the circumstance of their birth has been portrayed many times in art. Here, as it does with Helen and their other sister, Clytemnestra, the motif of an egg often appears, a reminder that their father was Zeus disguised as a swan. Again, you can only pity the poor mother. ■



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The Wines of Italy

As we have reported in our News pages this month, the popularity of Italian wine is currently increasing significantly. This extract from the new edition of **Karen MacNeil's** *Wine Bible* helps to explain how you can get the best value when you go out to buy it...

Photography © iStock





In Italy, making wine – like eating or breathing – is so utterly natural it almost seems instinctive. Grapevines grow everywhere; they are Italy's version of the American lawn. There is simply no region, no district, virtually no cranny of the country that does not produce wine. The numbers are astonishing: 1.9 million acres (769,000 hectares) of vineyard; 384,000 wineries; and some 377 different grape varieties cultivated (more varieties than in any other country), leading to a dizzying number of wines.

Wine at this order of magnitude can seem unfathomable – but of course, not all of these wines are considered to be of major importance. Scores of Italian wines are simple quaffing wines consumed almost entirely in or near the villages where they are made.

The Italian wines that knowledgeable wine drinkers get excited about come predominantly from a few major areas. These include Piedmont, Veneto, Friuli-Venezia Giulia, and Tuscany. I'll cover these in the most depth, but I'll also provide overviews of numerous other wine regions. North to south, these include Trentino-Alto Adige, the Alpine home of some of Italy's most pristine white wines; Lombardy, the source of Italy's best sparklers; Liguria, the crescent-shaped region known for wines that are easily paired with fresh seafood;

Emilia-Romagna, one of the greatest regions in the world for food, and the birthplace of cheerful, fizzy Lambrusco; Umbria, the home of dry, refreshing Orvieto; Abruzzi (the English name for Abruzzo), memorable for such soft, thick, mouth-filling reds as Montepulciano d'Abruzzo, a wine just waiting to be paired with rustic pasta dishes; and finally, Italy's most southern regions: Campania, Apulia, Basilicata, and Calabria, plus the islands of Sicily and Sardinia, all of which are sources of delicious wines that are good value, and several make wines from rare, ancient grape varieties as well.

Although wine and food are inextricably linked in most parts of the world, in Italy they are fervently wedded. Wines that seem slightly lean, tart, or bitter to some are highly appreciated by the Italians precisely because they have the grip and edge to slice through the dauntless flavours of Italian food. But it goes even further than that. In Italy, wine is food. Not so long ago, a daily supply of basic village wine cost Italians less than their daily supply of bread, according to Italian wine expert Burton Anderson, and both were as essential to an Italian diner as a fork and knife (probably more so). Along with olive oil, wine and bread make up what the Italians call the *Santa Trinità Mediterranea* – the Mediterranean Holy Trinity. An Italian friend once summed up the special affinity between Italian wine and food

this way: "In Italy, if someone drinks a little too much wine, the Italians don't say he has drunk too much; they say he hasn't eaten enough food yet."

Italian wines can vary substantially in flavour, texture, and body – even when the wines being compared are the same type. Two Chianti Classicos from estates less than a half mile apart can taste remarkably dissimilar. Some of this variability is due to differences in winemaking, for Italy is a country of fiercely maintained ancient traditions and, at the same time, extremely sophisticated modern methods. But an equally compelling reason is this: Italy is a tangle of different, tiny mesoclimates that powerfully influence the character of any given wine.

What creates those mesoclimates? The geography and variable climates of the land itself. You can stand on Italian soil and look at the Alps, but you can also stand on Italian soil and look at North Africa. The country is about 40 per cent mountains (even Sicily has them!) and another 40 per cent hills. As any drive from one village to the next proves, straight lines don't seem to exist in this country. The combined zigzagging slopes of hills and mountains, plus the close proximity of four seas (the Tyrrhenian, Adriatic, Ligurian, and Mediterranean), plus the geologic impact of numerous earthquakes has produced an almost pointillistic profusion of environments in which grapes grow.

Images, clockwise from above: Vineyard at Lake Santa Massenza, Trento, an area better known for its hydroelectric plant than its viticulture, but a wine-growing region nonetheless; online searches for Italian wine have increased substantially in recent years (see page 9); harvesting grapes in Sicily; Italians drink an average of 50 litres of wine per person per year, and export a lot more.



Although Italy's most revered wines are known worldwide, the grape varieties that constitute them are rarely found outside the country. You won't find Sangiovese, the leading grape of Chianti, or Nebbiolo, the grape that makes Barolo, growing in France, Spain, or Australia (except perhaps as an oddity). Even in the United States, the brief, so-called "Cal-Ital movement" of the late 1980s and early 1990s has been largely abandoned as

ITALY'S FINE WINE REVOLUTION

To gain insight into Italian wine today and to understand the revolution in quality that Italian wine underwent in the latter part of the 20th century, it's important to understand something of the history that led up to Italy's current wine laws. Admittedly, governmental regulations usually make for pretty dry reading but, in Italy's case, it's almost impossible to comprehend the country's wines without a grasp of how the wines are categorized by the Italian government and by the Italians themselves.

Italy's wine revolution was provoked by a set of regulations defining the areas where specific wines can be made. These laws – *Denominazione di Origine Controllata*, *Denominazione di Origine Controllata e Garantita*, and *Indicazione Geografica Tipica* – are known by their acronyms, DOC, DOCG, and IGT. More than 330 wine zones have been designated as DOCs and 73 as DOCGs, yet the wines from these zones, widely regarded as many of the best wines in the country, represent only a small percentage of all the Italian wines produced. Some 118 wine areas have been named IGTs, a more humble designation. (These same ensure that cheeses, hams, balsamic vinegars, and a host of other foods can come only from their designated traditional areas.)

The story behind these pivotal regulations begins in the 1960s. Although great wine families such as the Antinoris, Frescobaldi, Contini-Bonacossi, and Boscainis had all been making fine wine for centuries, many Italian wines were still the product of peasant winemaking. But with the enactment of the DOC laws in 1963, an official regulation stipulated standards for certain types of wine. The first wine given DOC status was the Tuscan white Vernaccia di San Gimignano, in 1966. The course of Italian wine changed dramatically.

No sooner had the DOC commandments been handed down than innovative Italian winemakers began to chafe against them. As comprehensive and protective as the DOC laws sought to be, they failed to take into consideration a key reality: advances in wine quality often come through creativity, innovation, and the introduction of new techniques. The DOC stipulations for any given type of wine were formed around what was traditional practice in that region. Traditional practice reflected traditional taste. And traditional taste was, in many cases, that of palates rarely exposed to anything more than the wine from vineyards within a 20-mile radius. By the 1970s, Italian winemakers were restless.

Piero Antinori, head of a centuries-old Tuscan winemaking family ➤

Italy is a tangle of different, tiny mesoclimates that powerfully influence the character of any given wine

California wineries have acknowledged that Italy grows her own indigenous grapes so much better.

As of the 1980s, the Italians, however, adopted Cabernet Sauvignon and other international varieties with lightning speed and total confidence. (The first wave of Cabernet Sauvignon plantings in Italy actually occurred in the late 18th century, although the appeal of this *uva francesca* – French grape, as the Italians called it – was initially found to be limited.) Today, Italian wine is a dual world where ancestral grape varieties and contemporary grape varieties easily exist side by side.



and a prominent force within the Italian wine industry, made the first well-publicized break with DOC regulations in 1971. Antinori's wine, called Tignanello, was modelled after a wine that virtually no one had ever heard of or tasted: Sassicaia. Although Sassicaia was made in Tuscany, it was neither a Chianti nor any other familiar type of Tuscan wine. It wasn't even based on the traditional Tuscan grape, Sangiovese. Sassicaia was a Cabernet Sauvignon; the inspiration behind it was French Bordeaux. Sassicaia was then a quiet, "underground" project, but Antinori knew about it because his cousins were its creators.

Like Sassicaia, Antinori's Tignanello was made in the Chianti region, but it was not – as far as the Italian government was concerned – a Chianti, since it had not been made according to the DOC regulations. Therefore, like Sassicaia, it could officially be considered only a *vino da tavola* (table wine), the lowest status an Italian wine can hold. Tignanello and Sassicaia thus became the first two *vini da tavola* to cost a small fortune in an ocean of *vini da tavola* that cost peanuts. None of this seemed to bother wine drinkers or the wine press, who bestowed on these wines (and the others like them that followed) their lasting nickname, the Super Tuscans.

Then, in 1980, just as the first steps toward better-quality wine were being taken in many parts of Italy,

the government enacted the DOCG – *Denominazione di Origine Controllata e Garantita* – for wines of exceptional quality and renown. The DOCG regulations were even more strict than the DOC. The first four DOCGs were Brunello di Montalcino and Vino Nobile di Montepulciano, in Tuscany; and Barolo and Barbaresco, in Piedmont, all designated in 1980. By 1999, there were 21 DOCGs. And by 2013, there were, as mentioned, 73.

Sassicaia was a quiet, "underground" project

Most of the initial DOCGs were red. Alas, the first of the white DOCGs, Albana di Romagna, granted in 1987, made the government look silly. Albana, a fairly neutral wine from the Emilia-Romagna region, comes nowhere close to being one of Italy's top white wines. Albana's status as the first white DOCG threw a cloak of suspicion over the whole system.

A more serious flaw in the DOCG, however, was the misleading word *garantita* (guarantee) in its title. In fact, the DOCG designation does not guarantee the quality of the wine. A DOCG is applied to an entire region. Both the greatest wine in that region and the worst get to say they are DOCG.

Finally, neither the DOC nor DOCG addressed the growing number of creative, nonconformist Italian wines, many of which came from places outside DOC and DOCG wine areas, and all of which continued to be officially considered mere *vini da tavola*. Therefore, in 1992, the third designation, *Indicazione Geografica Tipica* (Typical Geographic Indication), was created. While IGT wine zones include many places that make good – even great – wines, they are places that historically have never been considered as prestigious as the areas awarded DOC and DOCG status. Most IGT wines are the equivalent of French *vins de pays*, or country wines.

So what does all this mean in the end? From a practical standpoint, knowing that a wine has IGT, DOC, or DOCG status doesn't guarantee that that particular wine will be exemplary. Nor are these designations a classification system (like, say, the Grand Cru/Premier Cru classification of Burgundy, France). But Italy's designations are a tip-off to the places that are recognized for the quality or prestige of their wines.

You can think of the designations as forming a pyramid of Italy's wines. *Vini da tavola* constitute the broad base; IGT are next, in the middle; DOC wines are nearer the top; and DOCG wines are at the apex. But there are fantastic wines are to be found at every level. ■

Images, clockwise from top left: Wine can be grown anywhere the summers are long and sunny enough but, unlike balsamic vinegar, it must be stored at constant temperatures; vineyard in Tuscany, one of Italy's most famous wine-producing regions; Italy's mountainous terrain contributes to the large variety of microclimates in the country

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4 takes on SHALLOTS

The cultivation of shallots began in Asia but spread to Europe **many centuries ago**. In North America they are called scallions, a term derived from the Italian, *scalogni*...





1

Shallot, cucumber and tomato panzanella

Panzanella ai scalogni, cetrioli e pomodori

This classic Tuscan salad can be interpreted in many ways, though tomatoes and bread are essential.

SERVES 4

► **Preparation**
15 minutes

► **Cooking**
5-7 minutes

INGREDIENTS

½ cucumber

2 Romano peppers

12 cherry tomatoes

6 echalion (banana) shallots

2 slices of ciabatta/focaccia

2 garlic cloves, peeled

2 tbsp red wine vinegar

100ml good olive oil

8 basil leaves

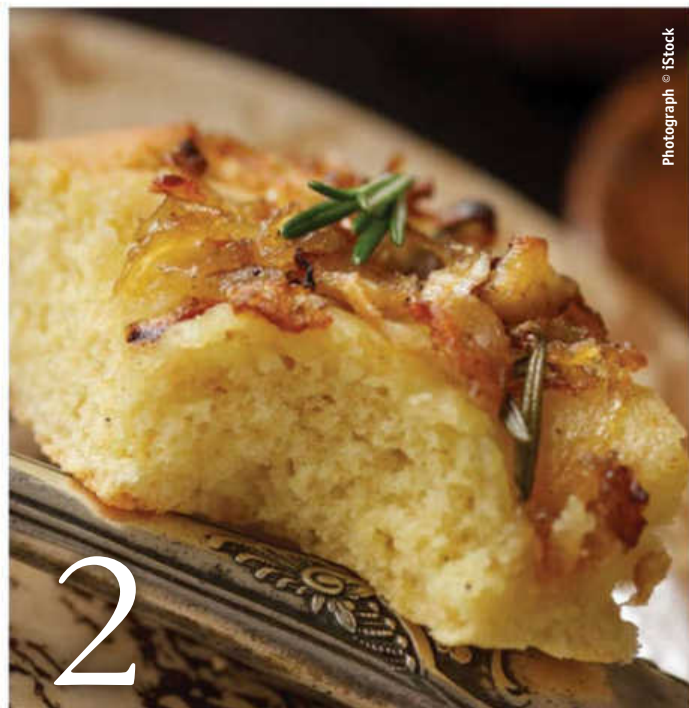
Peel the cucumber, cut in half lengthwise and remove the seeds with a teaspoon. Cut into 1cm squares. Cut the peppers into the same size as the cucumber. Cut the cherry tomatoes in half.

Cut the shallots in half lengthwise, remove the 'leaves', then cut into 1cm squares.

Cut the bread into bite-sized pieces, place on an oven tray with a little olive oil and season with salt and pepper. Bake at 200°C/Gas Mark 6 for 5-7 minutes, until just toasted, then remove.

Slice the peeled garlic very, very thinly, place in a bowl and add the vinegar and oil.

Place all the ingredients in a mixing bowl and mix together well. Check the seasoning and adjust if necessary. Add some finely shredded basil leaves to serve.



2

Focaccia with shallots and parmesan cheese

Focaccia con scalogni e parmigiano

Freshly baked focaccia is hard to beat as a starter for any meal. Here's our very own take on the classic bread.

SERVES 4-6

(Makes 2 loaves)

► **Preparation**
2½ hours
(including proving time)

► **Cooking**
30-45 minutes

INGREDIENTS

500g Italian 00 grade flour (or strong white flour)

2 sachets bread yeast

a large pinch of salt

350ml lukewarm water

extra-virgin olive oil

3 shallots, diced

50g Parmesan or Grana Padano, grated

2 sprigs fresh rosemary

Combine the flour, yeast, a large pinch of salt, water and a good glug of olive oil in a large bowl. Mix together with your hands until you have a pliable dough. Add more water or flour if necessary.

Knead for at least 5 minutes – ideally 10 – until the dough is smooth, then place back in the bowl with a dash of olive oil to ensure it doesn't stick. Place somewhere warm to prove for 1 hour, then re-knead for five minutes, then leave to prove for a further hour.

Cut the dough into two and, on separate, lightly oiled baking trays, gently flatten into rounds. Bake in a preheated (180°C/Gas Mark 6) oven for 20 minutes.

In the meantime, gently fry the shallots in a little olive oil with a pinch of sea salt. Add the grated parmesan to the top of each of the breads, and top with the fried shallots. Return to the oven and bake for a further 15-20 minutes. Cool on wire racks. Add a sprinkling of rosemary to serve.

Photograph © iStock

Recipe © Italia!



Spaghetti with shallot, red pepper and red pesto sauce

Spaghetti al sugo di scalogni, peperone e pesto rosso

Warming, satisfying and perfect for an instant supper. We are going to cheat with the sauce here and buy one in. After a day at work you won't notice the difference. To save even more time, cook a larger quantity of the shallots and peppers and keep the remainder in the fridge to use later in the week.

SERVES 4
 ➤ Preparation 10 minutes
 ➤ Cooking 15 minutes

INGREDIENTS

16 shallots, peeled and halved
 2 large red peppers, cored, deseeded and finely sliced
 1 tbsp olive oil
 400g spaghetti
 1 tub ready-made chilli and tomato red pesto or similar
 a handful of fresh, torn basil, to serve

Place the shallots and peppers in a frying pan with the olive oil and cook over a gentle heat until softened.

Cook the spaghetti according to packet directions, drain and stir in the pesto sauce, shallots and pepper, season to taste.

Serve in bowls sprinkled with the basil.



Shallot, gorgonzola and rocket risotto

Risotto agli scalogni, gorgonzola e rucola

For balsamic shallots, roast peeled whole shallots in olive oil, balsamic vinegar and a sprinkling of sugar at 180°C/ Gas Mark 4 until golden brown and soft. These are also lovely with roast turkey, steaks, duck etc.

SERVES 4
 ➤ Preparation 30 minutes
 ➤ Cooking 30 minutes

INGREDIENTS

| | |
|---|---------------------------------------|
| 1 litre good chicken or vegetable stock | 1-2 garlic cloves, peeled and crushed |
| 40g butter | 200g cubed gorgonzola cheese |
| 2 tbsp olive oil | 50g grated parmesan |
| shallots, peeled and roughly diced | 50g rocket, washed |
| 320g risotto rice | sea salt and black pepper |

Put the stock on to simmer. Melt the butter and olive oil in a heavy saucepan until the butter is just foaming.

Add the shallots and sauté, stirring for 2-3 minutes until softened but not brown, then add the rice and garlic. Cook until the rice turns slightly opaque but not brown, approximately 1 minute.

Add a good ladleful of hot stock. Stir until all the liquid has been absorbed. Continue adding the stock a ladleful at a time, stirring constantly, until the rice is slightly al dente – the consistency should be a thick porridge. Add the two cheeses and mix well. Season with black pepper and sea salt.

Stir in the rocket and cook for a further 30 seconds, until the rocket is just wilted. Remove from the heat. If the risotto becomes too thick, add a little more stock.

Serve with roasted whole balsamic shallots and shavings of parmesan.

At Home with Umami

In her new book, **Laura Santtini** focuses on the concept of 'umami'. Here we present some examples of how it applies to Italian cooking...

Ricotta, aubergine, molasses and crumbled prosciutto

Ricotta, melanzana, melassa e prosciutto sbriciolato

► **SERVES 4** ► **PREPARATION 35 minutes** ► **COOKING 15 minutes**

INGREDIENTS

4 large aubergines
olive oil, for frying
sea salt and freshly ground black pepper

500g fresh ricotta cheese
a handful of black olives,
stoned and quartered
blackstrap molasses
8 slices prosciutto

a sprinkling of flat-leaf
parsley, finely chopped
the zest of 1 lemon
extra-virgin olive oil,
for drizzling

Preheat the grill to high. Top and tail each aubergine, then stand it up vertically and cut the 4 sides (skin on) of each one off, making each side around 2cm thick. (You can keep the cores of the aubergine to roast and make into a dip, by adding to a blender with olive oil, lemon, salt and pepper and a dollop of tahini.)

Halve each slice of aubergine horizontally, then slice these into 1cm batons. Place the aubergine batons into a colander, sprinkle with approximately 2 tbsp sea salt and mix thoroughly. Place something very heavy over the aubergines, press down and then put the colander into a larger bowl or pan to catch the juices. Leave for at least 30 minutes, so all the bitter juices run out.

While you wait, grill the prosciutto until golden and very crispy.

Remove the aubergine batons from the colander, rinse well and squeeze out any excess liquid. Dry with paper towels.

In a large saucepan, shallow-fry the aubergine batons in batches until golden and slightly chewy. Remove and transfer to a baking tray covered with paper towels. Season with just black pepper (they will probably be salty enough). Keep warm in a low oven while you fry the rest.

Roughly spread the ricotta on a large serving dish and scatter the aubergine and olive pieces on top.

Drizzle with a little molasses and top with the prosciutto, crumbled in your hands. Combine the parsley and lemon zest together and scatter over the top, with a good twist of black pepper and a drizzle of extra-virgin olive oil.



Roast chicken with pomegranate, pancetta and brandy

Pollo arrosto con melagrana, pancetta e brandy

► **SERVES 4** ► **PREPARATION 15 minutes** ► **COOKING 90 minutes**

INGREDIENTS

3 *tbsp* olive oil
1 medium chicken,
jointed into 8 pieces by a butcher
sea salt and freshly ground black pepper
3 shallots (2 quartered, 1 chopped finely)
1 bunch fresh sage
4 garlic cloves
30g dried porcini mushrooms,
soaked in 250 ml of boiling water,
drained and chopped
4 medium pomegranates
25g butter
100g pancetta
a generous splash of brandy
250ml double cream
basmati rice, to serve

Preheat the oven to 180°C/Gas Mark 4. Heat the olive oil in a cast-iron casserole dish over a medium-high heat. Add the chicken and brown on all sides. Season well with salt and pepper.

Once browned, remove from the heat. Add the quartered shallots, half the sage, the garlic, and the liquid from the mushrooms (about 250ml). Replace the chicken, cover with a tight-fitting lid and roast in the preheated oven for 1 hour.

Meanwhile, deseed the pomegranates by slicing them in half and bashing them with a wooden spoon over a bowl so that the seeds fall out. Crush the seeds slightly with a potato masher to release their juices.

Take out the chicken and pour the pomegranate juices into the pan, reserving the seeds for later. Pop the chicken back into the oven.

Start making the sauce. Heat the butter in a medium saucepan over a medium heat. Once it has melted, add the chopped shallot and cook until translucent. Add the mushrooms, the rest of the sage and the pancetta and cook until the pancetta begins to crisp and the fat melts.

Once the chicken is cooked, pour off its sauce into the mushroom pan. Cover the chicken with foil to keep it warm.

Add the brandy and the double cream to the sauce. Simmer until the sauce has reduced enough to coat the back of a spoon, then pour it back over the chicken, sprinkle with the reserved pomegranate seeds, and serve immediately with bowls of hot basmati rice.



Umami antipasti

Antipasti all'umami

➤ **SERVES** 4-6 ➤ **PREPARATION** 15 minutes ➤ **COOKING** none

INGREDIENTS

1 tube Taste #5 Umami Bomb Original Recipe
8 salted anchovies in oil
truffle oil
12 sun-dried tomatoes
12 bite-sized chunks parmesan cheese
4 tbsp marinated green olives
4 tbsp marinated black olives
1 jar of marinated mushrooms in oil
1 jar of artichoke pieces in oil
12 slices of prosciutto di Parma

TO SERVE

extra-virgin olive oil
aged balsamic vinegar
mixed Italian breads

Squeeze out about 1 tbsp of the Umami Bomb and place the tube onto a wooden serving board. Drizzle the anchovies with the truffle oil. Arrange these and all the other platter ingredients neatly on the serving board. Be careful not to overfill the platter as it will begin to look messy. Give each person a ramekin with a drizzle of olive oil and a splash of balsamic vinegar and let everybody dig in!



Rich tomato risotto with kale pesto

Risotto al pomodoro con pesto di cavolo riccio

► **SERVES 4** ► **PREPARATION** 10 minutes ► **COOKING** 30 minutes

INGREDIENTS

40g butter

1 onion, very finely chopped

320g Arborio rice

1 large glass of full-bodied red wine

1 litre hot chicken or vegetable stock, or 2 stock cubes dissolved in 1 litre boiling water

1 tbsp sundried tomato purée, or Taste #5 Umami Bomb! XXX tomato purée

sea salt and freshly ground black pepper

FOR THE KALE PESTO

3 large handfuls kale, large stalks removed

1 large handful basil

40g pine nuts, toasted

50g coarsely grated parmesan cheese

1 garlic clove

2 tbsp extra-virgin olive oil

3 tbsp olive oil

freshly squeezed juice of ½ lemon and the zest of 1 lemon

salt to taste

FOR THE MANTECATURA (to finish)

60g cold butter, cut into small cubes

85g finely grated parmesan cheese

In a heavy-based saucepan, melt the butter and sauté the onion until soft and glassy but not coloured. Add the rice and coat until transparent.

Add the wine and stir until half of it has evaporated. Add a ladleful of the hot stock and simmer and stir. As the stock is absorbed,

add more stock when necessary, taking care to stir throughout (this releases the starch from the rice and make the risotto extra creamy).

Continue adding ladle after ladle of stock and stirring for about 18 minutes until the rice is soft, tender and creamy, but the grains are still al dente in the centre.

Meanwhile, make the pesto by putting all the ingredients into a food processor and whizzing to a paste. Season to taste.

When the risotto is ready, remove it from heat and beat in the butter and parmesan cheese (the *mantecatura*). Add the sundried tomato purée or Umami Bomb! XXX tomato purée and adjust the seasoning.

To serve, ladle some risotto onto a plate and top with a generous spoonful of kale pesto.

Fig and walnut biscotti

Biscotti di fichi e noci

➤ **MAKES** 24 ➤ **PREPARATION** 1 hour ➤ **COOKING** 20 minutes

INGREDIENTS

85g unsalted butter, softened

50g caster sugar

75g dark brown sugar

2 medium free-range eggs

1 tsp vanilla extract

the finely grated zest of ½ a large orange

255g plain flour

¼ tsp salt

1 tsp baking powder

¼ tsp bicarbonate of soda

1 tsp ground cinnamon

1 tsp ground ginger

¼ tsp ground nutmeg

⅛ tsp ground cloves

60g walnut halves,
roughly chopped and toasted

180g dried figs, roughly chopped

3 tbsp finely chopped rosemary

1 medium free-range egg white,
lightly beaten

Preheat the oven to 165°C/Gas Mark 3. In the bowl of an electric mixer, cream the butter and sugars together until fluffy. Add the eggs, one at a time, scraping down the sides of the bowl after every addition. Beat until well mixed then beat in the vanilla and orange zest.

In another bowl, sift together the flour, salt, baking powder, bicarbonate of soda, cinnamon, ginger, nutmeg and cloves. Tip them into the butter mixture and beat until

a firm-ish dough is formed. Add the walnuts, figs and rosemary and beat until well combined. Tip the dough onto clingfilm, and chill until completely firm (35-40 minutes).

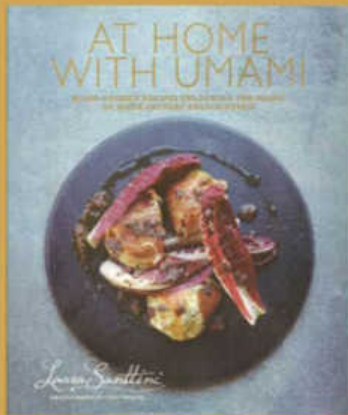
Once firm, lightly grease a baking sheet. Divide the dough into two and roll each piece into a log, about 30cm long and 10cm wide. Place on the baking sheet. Brush with the egg white and sprinkle with sugar.

Bake in the preheated oven for 15-20 minutes, or until the logs are golden brown. Remove and allow to cool for 10 minutes. With a serrated knife, cut each log into slices, about 1-1.5cm thick and lay them, sliced-side down, onto the baking sheet, then return to the oven for a further 20 minutes, until toasted and crisp. Let them cool before serving.

INFORMATION

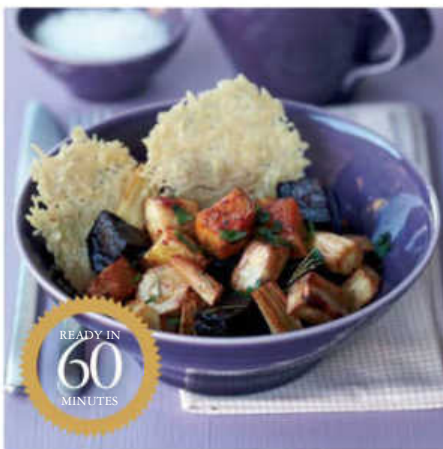
➤ *At Home with Umami* by Laura Santtini, photographs by Con Poulos, published by Ryland Peters & Small.

➤ *At Home with Umami* is available to *Italia!* readers for the special price of £13.99 including postage & packaging (RRP £19.99) by telephoning Macmillan Direct on ☎ 01256 302699 and quoting the reference EA6).



Pronto!

Some of the more complex Italian recipes will take hours to prepare – and just as long to enjoy! – but when you're in a hurry you're going to need quick-and-easy meals to cook. *Italia!* presents five two-person favourites...



Root vegetable salad with frico crisps

Insalata invernale con frico

Frico is typical of Friuli and is made by frying grated cheese – sometimes (though not here) mixed with grated potatoes. It is basically the same as Swiss *rösti*. (Though don't tell anyone from Friuli we said that!) The difference is in the cheese – Montasio is the cheese of choice in Friuli. You do need a good, high-fat, hard cheese. Some Cheddars will do the job, as will Parmesan or Grana Padano.

- **SERVES** 2
- **PREPARATION** 5 minutes
- **COOKING** 55 minutes

INGREDIENTS

300g sweet potato
300g beetroot
300g parsnips
2 tbsp extra-virgin olive oil
sea salt and freshly ground black pepper
2 sprigs of rosemary

FOR THE FRICO CRISPS

1 small bunch of flat-leaf parsley, finely chopped
50g Montasio cheese, or alternative

Preheat the oven to 200°C/Gas Mark 6. Peel the vegetables and cut into 2cm cubes. Place in a baking tray, drizzle with oil and toss with salt and pepper. Lay the rosemary on top and roast for about 45 minutes, until tender.

In the meantime, grate the cheese and line a baking tray with parchment paper. Shape the grated cheese into four flat discs and place on the baking tray.

Turn the oven down to 180°C/Gas Mark 4 once the vegetables have finished cooking. Place the baking tray containing the frico crisps in the oven for 6-8 minutes, until they are cooked but not brown.

Sprinkle the roast vegetable with parsley and serve with the frico crisps on the side.



Halibut with sweet and sour aubergine

Ippoglosso con melanzane agrodolce

Always buy Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) labelled halibut to ensure that the fish is from sustainable sources.

- **SERVES** 2
- **PREPARATION** 10 minutes
- **COOKING** 15 minutes

INGREDIENTS

extra-virgin olive oil
1 onion, peeled, diced
1 large aubergine
sea salt and freshly ground black pepper
1 tbsp red-wine vinegar
2 tbsp raisins
2 tbsp toasted pine nuts
3 plum tomatoes, coarsely chopped (use tinned if you can't find good-quality ripe tomatoes)
a small bunch of basil, chopped
1 tsp caster sugar
2 halibut fillets

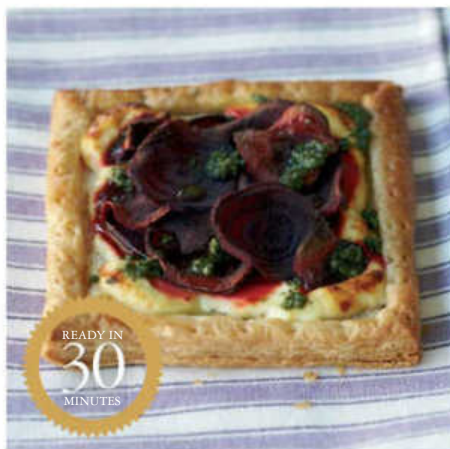
Preheat the oven to 180°C/Gas Mark 4. In an oven-proof saucepan, sauté the onion on the hob until soft, for about 10 minutes. Transfer to a large bowl.

Cut the aubergine into strips, rinse, drain and pat dry. Heat some olive oil in a large, deep pan, add the aubergines and cook with the lid off for 2 minutes. Cover and cook for a further 3 minutes, then remove the lid again and cook a little more, to let some of the juices evaporate.

Add the aubergines and their oil to the onions. Season, then add the red-wine vinegar. Stir in the raisins, pine nuts, tomatoes, basil and sugar.

Season the halibut fillets and fry, skin-side down, in hot oil, in the saucepan for 2 minutes. Then put the pan in the oven for 3 minutes.

Serve the halibut fillets with the aubergines on the side and extra-virgin olive oil drizzled over the top.



Puff pastry tarts with beetroot, pesto and ricotta

Torte di barbietola con pesto e ricotta

Beetroot and ricotta is a match made in heaven, and here it is enhanced yet further by the addition of a good hint of basil.

- **SERVES** 2
- **PREPARATION** 10 minutes
- **COOKING** 20 minutes

INGREDIENTS

1 medium beetroot
100g puff pastry rolled into two 15x13cm rectangles
1 small free-range egg, beaten
80g ricotta
1 tbsp grated Parmesan or Grana Padano
salt and freshly ground black pepper
1 tbsp good-quality pesto mixed with 1 tbsp extra-virgin olive oil

Preheat the oven to 200°C/Gas Mark 6. Peel the beetroot then, using a mandolin or sharp knife, slice it into very fine slivers. Set aside.

Prick the surface of the puff pastry rectangles with a fork, then score a 1cm border around the edges, being careful not to go through the pastry. Brush this border with the beaten egg, reserving any that is left over.

Mix the ricotta in a bowl with the Parmesan and leftover egg, then season. Spread the ricotta over the puff pastry, then add the beetroot in a mound on top. Place in the oven. After about 20 minutes, the pastry should be cooked. Drizzle the pesto and oil mixture over the tart to serve.



Fillet steak with Jerusalem artichoke and porcini

Filetto di manzo con topinambur e porcini

The Jerusalem artichokes impart a wonderfully nutty flavour to this dish that complements the earthiness of the mushrooms.

- **SERVES** 2
- **PREPARATION** 5 minutes
- **COOKING** 20 minutes

INGREDIENTS

2 fillet steaks
extra-virgin olive oil, to drizzle
120g Jerusalem artichokes
200g fresh porcini mushrooms
2 tbsp olive oil
3 heaped tbsp double cream
1 glass dry white wine
1 tbsp lemon juice
salt and freshly ground black pepper
1 small bunch flat-leaf parsley, chopped

Season the steaks on both sides, then drizzle with a little olive oil. Heat a griddle pan on a high flame and cook the steaks for 4-5 minutes on each side for rare. Leave to rest on a warm plate.

In the meantime, scrub the Jerusalem artichokes and wipe the porcini clean with a damp cloth. Finely slice the Jerusalem artichokes.

In a frying pan, heat 2 tbsp olive oil, add the Jerusalem artichoke, and cook for around 4 minutes. In the meantime, slice the porcini thickly lengthwise, then add to the artichokes.

Pour the white wine into the pan, cook for a further 2 minutes, then stir in the cream, add the lemon juice and top with the parsley. Season. Serve the steaks with the porcini and artichoke mixture.



Crespelle cannelloni with red ricotta

Crespelle al forno con ricotta

Crespelle are pancakes, but this recipe is a long way from the lemon and sugar dressing you may associate with them.

- **SERVES** 2
- **PREPARATION** 10 minutes
- **COOKING** 50 minutes

INGREDIENTS

1 tbsp olive oil
1 large bunch of swiss chard
1 onion, peeled, chopped
FOR THE CRESPELLE
1 tbsp unsalted butter, melted plus extra butter, for frying
2 large free-range eggs
1 free-range egg yolk
350ml milk
1 tbsp unsalted butter, melted plus extra butter, for frying
a pinch of sea salt
225g Italian '00' or plain flour

FOR THE RED RICOTTA

2 free-range egg yolks
300ml passata
150g ricotta
100ml double cream
salt and freshly ground black pepper

Start by making the crespelle batter. Melt the butter in a pan and sift the flour into a bowl. In a separate bowl beat the eggs and yolk, then add the milk, butter and salt. Add the flour to the egg mixture and whisk.

Preheat the oven to 180°C/Gas Mark 4. Heat a frying pan with a little butter, add a ladleful of batter and cook on each side for a minute. Set aside. Repeat.

Sauté the onion. Wash the chard and slice. Add to the pan with 2 tbsp water. Put a lid on for 3 minutes, then remove and let some of the water evaporate. Check the chard is tender, then set aside.

Whisk together the ingredients for the ricotta. Butter an ovenproof dish. Place spoonfuls of the cooked chard down the middle third of a crespella, roll it up and place widthways in the baking dish. Repeat, fitting each roll tightly. Pour the red ricotta sauce over the top, and bake for around 30 minutes.

COFFEE BEANS

Every city, every town, every village and pretty well every house in Italy has a means of **making a decent coffee**. And for the best you need fresh beans. *Italia!* tests a selection...

Every morning starts with one; a means of waking up and getting ready for the day. A shot of coffee (or usually two) prepared to your choosing. Espresso? Cappuccino? Americano? We all have our favourites. Coffee is as much a part of Italian culture as tea is to the British (though the former has travelled from one country to the other rather better than the latter). The Italians sneer at the concept of 'instant' coffee, freeze-dried and placed in a jar that may hang around for months. No, they – and we! – want the real deal. And that means fresh beans. You don't necessarily need to own a fancy 'bean to cup' machine – you can purchase a quality bean grinder for as little at £40 which will turn your beans into a perfect espresso-grade powder, which you can then add to your espresso machine or even stove-top coffee maker. Once you've opened your pack or tin of beans, store them in a sealed container in the fridge to ensure ultimate freshness, and, if possible, use them within a couple of weeks.

Please note, all tastings were conducted with double espresso coffees, so no milk was involved to affect the taste.

ILLY MONOARABICA WHOLE BEAN COFFEE: BRAZIL

From Waitrose

www.waitrose.co.uk

Price **£6.50** for 250g

Illy is, of course, one of the best known brands of Italian coffee. (Not that the beans are grown in Italy!) As well as the 'standard' Illy blend of mixed beans, the company is now producing a range called Monoarabica, where high-quality Arabica beans are sourced from a single country. Enter what we here at *Italia!* consider the pick of the bunch – the Brazilian beans. Brazil is synonymous with coffee as much as it is with football, and it excels at both. These beans produce an astonishingly flavoursome cup of coffee. At once both crisp and deep, an espresso made with these has an intoxicating chocolate note with balanced bitterness and acidity. For sure, at £6.50 a tin they're not exactly cheap, but in this case you definitely get what you pay for.

VERDICT ★★★★★

Brazil shoots and scores with this 100 per cent Arabica blend of beans from Illy. Top draw beans to grace any cup.



1 PERCOL 'BLACK AND BEYOND' ESPRESSO COFFEE BEANS

From Widely available in supermarkets

Price (Typically) **£3.49** for 250g

If you like your coffee strong in flavour then these beans certainly pack a punch. They're quite bitter, but with chocolate overtones.

VERDICT ★★★

Good value for money for those of you who want a decent kick in the morning. Also great after dinner – just don't expect to sleep.

2 LAVAZZA QUALITA ROSSA

From Widely available in supermarkets

Price (Typically) **£3.99** for 250g

Another favourite in Italy, this Lavazza coffee is a favourite the world over. It's finely balanced and not too strong, though it's potent enough to wake you up in the morning! It's smooth and endearing.

VERDICT ★★★★★

Illy wins the fight for the best Italian coffee beans, but Lavazza comes in a close second. This makes a great espresso.



3 WAITROSE 'DARK & DISTINCTIVE' ITALIAN STYLE COFFEE BEANS

From Waitrose

www.waitrose.co.uk

Price 2.59 for 250g

If you want seriously good value for money then these beans are the business. They produce rich, intensely flavoured coffees with a dark, lingering smokiness.

VERDICT ★★★★★

A lovely, deep-flavoured espresso from this extremely well-priced bag of beans. What's not to like?

4 WAITROSE 'RICH & DARK' ESPRESSO ROASTED COFFEE BEANS

From Waitrose

www.waitrose.co.uk

Price 3.79 for 250g

A step up from the beans described to the left, these Waitrose-sourced beans have an added level of character and intensity. Dark chocolate and spice are to the fore.

VERDICT ★★★★★

Not far off in quality to the beans by Illy, though at almost half the price. Well worth a taste if you like your coffee intense.

5 TAYLORS RICH ITALIAN BEANS

From Widely available from supermarkets

www.taylorscoffee.co.uk

Price (Typically) £3.49 for 250g

They're certainly rich! The espressos we made with these beans really hit the spot. Very dark and strong, with a cardamom 'spike', these beans rank among the best.

VERDICT ★★★★★

The beans made an absolutely superb espresso and they also represent great value for money. Give them a go!

6 CO-OPERATIVE FAIRTRADE ITALIAN STYLE COFFEE BEANS

From Co-operative

www.co-operativefood.co.uk

Price £3.49 for 227g

Milder than the rest of the beans we've tasted in this test, the coffees produced were smooth and well-balanced. Also makes a great cappuccino.

VERDICT ★★★★★

If you prefer your early morning 'starter' a touch milder, then these beans from the Co-op are a great way to go.

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GAVI WINES

It's known for its majestic red wines, but Piedmont can also produce some very fine whites. And chief among them is Gavi. **Paul Pettengale** samples some of the best examples...

The Alessandria province, within the Italian region of Piedmont, lies around 100km (60 miles) south of the region's capital of Turin. And it is here that the best-known and most-loved white wine from the region is made. Gavi may be massively overshadowed by the reds of the region – Barolo, Barbaresco, Barbera – but it stands head and shoulders above many an Italian white; it is rich in flavour, yet crisp and precise.

Gavi is made using the Cortese grape variety, which has been planted in the area since Roman times. Indeed, Gavi (the town itself) was once a Roman military settlement, and many a glass was supped! The best

Gavi stands head and shoulders above many an Italian white wine

wines are labelled Gavi di Gavi, although that title no longer holds legal accreditation. Whereas once Gavi wines were rare on the shelves of our stores and on the wine lists of our restaurants in the UK (and US), they have become increasingly popular and therefore more prevalent. Although not as obvious as the ever sought after Pinot Grigio, Gavi is appearing in supermarkets as well as in independent wine stores. And it can be very good value for money! That said, if you want to push the boat out, there are plenty of options available offering complex and deeply rewarding wines, albeit from specialist importers. Over the page we've selected seven wines that represent a cross-section of Gavi, starting at around £8 and going up to the higher end, at around £17. All are delicious. ➤



GAVI 2014, BROGLIA

From The Co-operative

www.co-operativefood.co.uk

Price £7.99

A few years ago the 'stock' white wine in my house was a Pinot Grigio from Waitrose. Now it's this: a simply stunning Gavi that defies its price tag. It has lemon and freshly cut grass and a touch of sage on the nose; it's medium-bodied, though has a creamy density and easily enough fruit to really fill the mouth. The finish is a touch abrupt, but then you'd not expect the Cortese grape to offer anything too complex or lingering at this price level. That said, this wine offers exceptional value for money.

GAVI DI GAVI 'BRIC SASSI' 2014, ROBERTO SAROTTO

From Berry Bros. & Rudd

www.bbr.com

Price £12.50

This is a mid-priced Gavi di Gavi, but it manages to pack a real punch. Against all odds (storms in 2014 wrecked havoc across the region, devastating vines through Piedmont), Roberto Sarotto managed to craft a wine with a finesse and balance, with undamaged grapes carefully chosen and hand-picked. The citrus aroma sears through the nose, but there's plenty of herb and apple peel in there to tempt you into tasting a medium-bodied, succulent wine with nice minerality.

GAVI DI GAVI 'TERRE ANTICHE' 2014, LA GIUSTINIANA

From Liberty Wines

www.libertywines.co.uk

Price £14.99

This is prime Gavi di Gavi, complex yet delicate, totally honest and – although not cheap – excellent value for money. Some may scoff at the use of a screw cap, but if anything the employment of this method of enclosure helps this wine maintain its freshness. It has lime and white flower aromas; it's light in the mouth, though has plenty on offer in terms of taste – apples, lemon – and is accomplished in its acidity/minerality balance.

GAVI DI GAVI 'LUGARARA' 2014, LA GIUSTINIANA

From Liberty Wines

www.libertywines.co.uk

Price £16.99

Another wine from the Giustiniana estate, this one is a touch more complex and challenging (in a good way!) than its slightly cheaper sibling. The wine has a greenish look to it, which is supplemented by lime peel aromas. There's some peach in there too, however, which revives itself when tasted. Medium-bodied, this wine is elegant and really well constructed – the hand-picked and selected fruit very much evident. One of the best Gavis you'll find.



GREAT WITH...

We enjoy this with pretty much any chicken dish, especially Sunday roast.



GREAT WITH...

This wine works well with pan-fried scallops cooked with a little bit of sage.



GREAT WITH...

Delicate fish-based dishes, especially sea bass and sea bream.



GREAT WITH...

Be brave! Chuck a couple of thick pork chops on the griddle pan!

GAVI DI GAVI 'LA MINAIA' 2014, NICOLA BERGAGLIO

From Great Western Wine
www.greatwesternwine.co.uk
Price £12.95

Back in 2012 this Gavi di Gavi received a coveted *Tre Bicchieri* award in the hallowed *Gambero Rosso* wine guide. Well, this year's *Gambero Rosso* is yet to be published, but we expect this 2014 vintage to fare extremely favourably. A pale gold in colour it has ample ripe pear and pink apple aromas with a slightly salty mineral twang. Rich and rewarding – medium bodied, crisp, not at all 'heavy' – it fills the mouth with generous fruit. Very, very good value.



GREAT WITH...

The perfect match here would be a cracked, though undressed, fresh crab.

GAVI 2014, LA TOLEDANA

From Majestic
www.majestic.co.uk
Price £11.99

In its tall, thin bottle, this Gavi immediately sets itself out from the crowd. It looks sophisticated, a little bit 'arty' and – as you'd expect – it drinks that way too. On the nose it's really rather intriguing... There's a mixture of lemon, lime, apple and peach stone; to taste it's snappy yet robust, with more citrus than grape, but it's not overly acidic in any way. Indeed, this wine possesses a fine poise and balance with just enough minerality to round it off. We'd suggest you drink it with seafood.



GREAT WITH...

Lightly seasoned flat fish, simply grilled with a knob of parsley butter.

GAVI 2014 ARALDICA

From Majestic
www.majestic.co.uk
Price £7.99

Some of the best wines are the simplest. And in this case the principle rings true. This is Gavi as you'd expect it to be when served in a taverna in Piedmont: crisp, fresh, lively and exciting without being overly complicated or ambitious. Green apple and lime aromas kick through and, when it is sipped, you're delighted with a lively freshness of flavour. It's light in body, but that's not in any way a criticism. This is a wine that you could enjoy on its own as well with our food recommendation below.



GREAT WITH...

Shuck a dozen oysters, sprinkle with smoked salt and gulp them back!

PUT SOME SPARKLE IN YOUR LIFE

The Piedmont region is one of the more celebrated wine producing regions when it comes to making sparkling wines. Moscato d'Asti is a lightly fizzy wine known for its delicate structure and slightly sweet taste. The reason for that sweetness? A lack of alcohol – in fact, many Asti Spumante wines are little more than 5 per cent ABV (many beers are at least that). But what they lack in punch they make up for in flavour with apple, sweet pear, tangerine and peach notes. They should only be lightly chilled – a couple of hours in the fridge at most – otherwise you'll kill the delicacy and flavour of these fun, fruity wines. Oh, and drink them within a year of purchase.

*Many Asti Spumante
wines are little more than
5 per cent ABV*



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ICONS

Think of transport in Venice and you think of the gondola, but this is a relationship that has been developed in large part by the city's tourism industry. As a working boat, there are better options.

#08

THE GONDOLA

Though it is now recognized the world over as **the typical boat of Venice**, the gondola is in fact one of many classes of vessel developed in La Serenissima...

Look back, if you will, at Sara Scarpa's spectacular feature on the Venice Regatta this month (from page 62) and you will see, as Sara explains, that rowing in Venice is done standing up, because the waters of Venice can be very shallow in places and you need to be able to see what you are rowing in.

The other matter, other than the safety of your oars and the arms attached to them, is being able to see other traffic, of which there has always been plenty in Venice. Today there are some 400 gondolas in the city, most of them in the tourist trade, but there used to be more.

And gondolas weren't the only types of boats in Venice. The *caorlina* Sara shows us on page 64 is another typically Venetian boat, one again that is rowed standing up. They used to be commonplace, though they are nowadays mostly reserved for racing.

But that's not the only other boat to have evolved here either. There is the *gondolino*, the *pupparino*, the *mascareta*, the *batella*, the *batelon*, the *bragagna*, the *bragosso*, the *paeta*, the *topo*, the *topa*, the *trabaccolo*... And more. Some are rowed (standing up); some are sailed; some can be manoeuvred by either method. But the gondola alone gives the tourist a sense of being ferried around in style, and it is for this reason, rather than any other, that it has become iconic. ■



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